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TANNHAUSER

MINNESINGER AND KNIGHT TEMPLAR

A ROMANCE OF THE THIRD AND FOURTH CRUSADES

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TANNHÄUSER

MINNESINGER AND KNIGHT [illegible]R

A Metrical Romance

TIME OF THIRD AND FOURTH [illegible]

Translated from the German of [illegible]

BY

CHARLES G. KENDALL

In Two Volumes

VOLUME II

BOSTON
Richard G. Badger
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Valedictory		

I

THE FIDDLE KING

On the broad and marshy meadow,
Far along the river stretching,
Many hundred storks are gathered.
All are white, the grass obscuring,
But their bills are long and dusky
And their legs are lank and reddish.
What a flapping, what a babbling,
What a nodding, hopping, shaking,
Long neck craning, pinion stretching
'Mong the fluttering assemblage!
Not one single brother longleg
Can his own croak hear distinctly.
They have called a general muster
Weighty questions to consider
As to their autumn migration.
Destination,— that they all know;
Now they must select a leader
As their alderman and captain,

Whose superior long billed wisdom
The assembled wingéd cohorts
Must obey and ask no questions.
  On the Rhine 'tis now late autumn,
Also on the Elbe and Weser,—
And your inborn native instinct
Southward urges you to migrate,—
But O wise and clacking long necks,
Tell me who went round to call you,—
Causing at the appointed moment
And at the appointed trysting
Your arrival in such numbers.
  Who, from nest to nest as courier,
Through the land the letters carried?
Have ye varlets and ambassadors?
Did the tell-tale winds inform you?
Or through hedges and the hamlets
Flew a stroller with the summons?
How ye manage is your secret,
But some other birds of passage
Your example now have followed,—
Like you fledged and light of pinion,
Like you through the country scattered,
Neither pelf nor home possessing,
Everywhere at home and nowhere.
  O ye long bills on the Weser,
To the heavens mount up quickly;
When ye then are headed southward,
Other bands of roving gentry
Ye will fly directly over.
Ye will see them and will hear them,
For these folk are migratory
Like yourselves, and noisy chatter
Is a part of their vocation.

Sudden soared the storks in the azure,
And when on their southern journey
Over Spessart they were flying,
— Looking down as on they hurried —
Far below them in the forest
They observed a strange assemblage.
At the foot of Geier Mountain
'Mong the lofty hoary oak trees
Was a camp of nomad people;
Huts and tents around were scattered,
Large and small ones well constructed,
Also others loosely builded
Out of simple piney branches,—
Only meant for transient shelter
'Gainst the winds and sudden showers
For whatever tired sleeper
Might himself bestow inside them.
Carts were there and wagons also
With their patched up sanded coverings
Arching over,— to them fastened
Jackasses or dogs of burden.
With a chain a bear was tethered,
Educated poodles licked their
Chops and sniffed among the frypans;
On their haunches squatting sat there
Half starved long tailed bristly monkeys,
Always busy, busy scratching.
What a people! And what faces
Were among them! Menfolk, women,
Wenches, urchins, bawling babies,
All heads counting near four hundred,
Most miraculous garments wearing.
Every style and every color
One can possibly conceive of

On their caps and raiment visible ;
Leather jackets, ragged waistcoats,
Shirts of mail and cotton jerkins,
Sharkskin and moth eaten furcoats,
Old and faded scarlet silk stuffs,
Parti-colored, threadbare, changeable,
With their grimy silver edgings.
Ragamuffin rags and tatters
Side by side with tidy garments
Worn by many well clothed youngsters,
And by many prinked up damsels.
  Everything was trimmed or covered
With the quaintest gauds and spangles,
Ribbons, bowknots, jingling sashes,
Stiff or quite dilapidated
Drooping and bedraggled feathers,
Buckles, chains and other couplings
Of most wonderful materials.
And beside this, what queer people!
  Sturdy brawny jovial fellows,
Bearded, beggar-proud and weaponed,—
Lusty supple limbs possessing,
Skilled in tumbling and in dancing ;
Men with stubby hedgehog bristles ,
Girls with long hair thickly braided,
Round and slender lissome figures
With agreeable countenances
Pouting ruby lips displaying,
Brimming o'er with merry laughter,—
To their eager thievish lovers
Sometimes yielding up their kisses.
  Of inherited special instincts
Every feature was expressive.
Sturdy and unfettered freedom,

Carelessness and mirthful humor
In their fearless glances sparkled,—
All their faces, no exceptions,
To their special calling witnessed.
Most of them were, in addition,
Honorable honest fellows,—
Through existence careless passing,
With their lot not discontented,—
Who, at all times free and easy,
True and honest hearts possessing
Everywhere sustained each other,
When 'twere possible always helping.
  But what sort of people were these?
Their vocation? — They were strollers,
Vagrants, mountebanks and jugglers,—
And among this queer assemblage,
In the medley quite conspicuous
With his bold expressive features,
Like some ancient scripture elder
Stood the Fiddle King as captain.

  Since Spervogel and Tannhäuser
Sailed away from Venice City
Just four years were now elapséd.
All this time among the strollers
Was much wond'ring and head-shaking,
Knowing that he had determined
To the far-famed distant Orient
In his latter days to journey,
And 'twas current,— "he must be a
Greater sinner 'gainst his conscience
Than we know of;" — few had heard of
The old stroller's obligation
To Tannhäuser; — most regarded

Him as lost to them forever,
And that thought had been most painful
To the mass of strolling players; —
For among them exercised he,
As it were, a sovereign power,—
Also 'tween them were the strongest
Ties of brotherly affection;
Never waned Spervogel's prestige,
But the older to the younger
Generation it transmitted.
  Wonderfully in his absence,
—Virtually dead considered —
Giant like and quite heroic
Waxed Spervogel's treasured figure,—
Sung in verse or but narrated.
When 'twas known he had departed
With the levies all were sorry,—
And 'twas 'mong them oft repeated
That the social regulations
Of their merry league of strollers
Now must altogether perish,
Since their captain now had left them.

  Thus immeasurably greater
Was the pleasure and rejoicing,
When 'twas known the King of Strollers
From the distant Holy Countries
Was returned alive and hearty.
Everybody wished to see him,—
Each one questioned; — where then is he?
Is he changed much? What's he up to?
Ev'n the youngest, who Spervogel
Only knew by common hearsay,

To behold his actual presence
Now were anxious and desirous.
  Also craved the stroller captain
All his well belovéd children
— As he called all strolling players —
Round him once more to assemble,—
And to all had sent due warning
Of a general stroller's meeting
On the coming Holyrood day
'Neath the Geierberg, in Spessart.
  Then exulted and fermented
All the strollers' blood in Germany,—
Reaching to the furthest corners
Of the realm in all directions,
As the heart its blood distributes
Through its vast arterial system;
And if ever legs of strollers
Willing on their errands started,
Welcome news with pleasure carrying,
'Twas the case with this one message.
  Air and water helped to spread it; —
As from little rills and brooklets
Into mill streams water gathers,
And the mill streams form great rivers
Constantly augmenting, swelling,—
So it was with the intelligence
Of the Fiddle King's returning.
  No one knew how the receivers
Got their news so very quickly,—
But all hands were, as appointed,
At the rendezvous in Spessart,
— Like the storks along the meadow —
To extend a hearty greeting
And in honor of Spervogel

'Mong themselves an honest jovial
Strollers' festival to hold there.

When toward Spessart he had set out,
On the way he met with many
Of his wandering companions.
Fast increased the stroller's escort,—
Like a conquering hero strode he
At the head of trusty followers
To the appointed forest trysting,
The ancient donkey pathway following.
Hills and valleys fairly echoed
With the plaudits of the strollers
Who were waiting,—all expectant,
His arrival at the camp ground
As he joined them;—and the masses
Quite excited surged about him,—
With their rough and ready greetings
Almost putting life in danger.
Down his weather beaten visage
Rolled the tears at such reception,
And no words found he to utter.
But to smother his emotion
Which Spervogel felt ashamed to
Show before the younger people,
Bow and fiddle quickly grasping,
He begun with lusty vigor
Merrily for them to fiddle,
As could play but he, the master;—
Thus was gained a space for breathing
For awhile all were attentive,
But soon moved by common impulse
All restraint they cast asunder,
Broke into a very bedlam,—

By the shoulders grabbed each other,
Danced and sung and leapt exultant.
Like a furious witches' sabbath
Was the turning, twisting, hazing
And the general commotion,—
Until all were quite exhausted.
This beheld Spervogel laughing,
Dropped his magic bow and fiddle
And his dripping forehead sponged off.

On the yestern all this happened,
But to-day 'twas much more quiet.
For their old and loved companion
A commodious sylvan arbor
They had built there, and his lodging
In it careful had made ready.
Many brought him various presents,
Ornaments and curious trinkets
Carefully by them collected
On their distant trips and journeys.
In the shade of an old oak tree
Which was standing on a hillock
In a bit of open meadow
Out of moss and skins and branches
They had built a seat of honor,
Like a royal throne constructed.
On the branches of the oak tree,
From the tree trunk arching downward,
Crimson hangings stuffs and banners
They had hung to serve as shelter.
Thither now he was conducted,
And as soon as he was seated
They arranged for his amusement
Such a pageant as was never

Even for the greatest payment
By another's eye e'er witnessed.
  In their gala dress appareled,
All their various paraphernalia
And their skill they showed before him.
Singly or in little groupings
They stepped forward, and their smartest
And most startling tricks unfolded.
Some were able various songbirds'
Notes to imitate exactly;
Some competed with each other,
Ground and lofty tumbling doing
With much skill and strength of body.
Some performers represented
Witty pantomimic pieces,—
Managed puppets, acting, speaking,
As if they were living people,—
Or their tame beasts educated
Put through all their tricks and paces;—
And at last came what was better.
  Quite a lot of handsome damsels
Passionately, ravishingly
Danced and little plays enacted
Here among themselves, where each one
Was a part of the Profession.
For this once the stroller maidens
A free sight of all their beauties
Their associate willing proffered.
  Each was garlanded with flowers,
And with tresses loosely waving
Wore short skirting and short bodice;
Arms were naked, also shoulders,—
Or were sometimes scarce concealed by
Thin and gauzy muslin veilings.

Ah! they curved and turned and twisted
In transporting sinuous movements
To the sound of charming measures
On their fiddles, flutes and tambours
Played by old experienced artists.
Sooth their smiles were so bewitching,
And their figures' undulations
Were so wonderfully supple,
That it set all hearts a-thumping,—
Whether they were old or youthful.

After the entrancing finish
Of the motley entertainment,
Next in order was the feasting.
By the women stirred and tended,
In the forest fires were burning,—
Steam poured out from pots and kettles,
Pans were baking bread, and stewing,—
On the spits was here some mutton,
There a rabbit or a roebuck,—
And the feathers on the herbage
Countless chickens indicated.
All had diligently striven
Special dainties to acquire
And to keep the choicest portions
For this feast day, more luxurious
Than was usual 'mong the strollers.
Wines and liquors were abundant; —
Quite embarrassed was Spervogel
How to manage and dispose of
All the choice selected tidbits,
All the many strong potations
Which to him were constant tendered.
After feasting all hands gathered

'Neath the trees, and 'mid the bushes
In the autumn slowly yellowing,
On the green sward close together,—
And when all were quite assembled
And in parti-colored raiment
Grouped about most picturesquely,
'Twas a lively, merry assemblage.
  The autumnal rays of sunshine
Every color made conspicuous,—
Glowing crimson, garish yellow,
Blue and brown and light and dusky
Were reflected from bright buttons,
Buckles, spangles and embroideries.
  The expressive countenances
Of these hardy wiry people
In the sunshine showed up plainly;
Sunburned seemed a little darker,
Scars were heightened,—folds and wrinkles
Shadowed forth with great distinctness,—
Round and fresh and youthful faces
Rosy-red and blooming sparkled.
Old and toughened catgut scrapers
Sat around with jugs and goblets,
Bent on washing down and flooding
With the last drop of the liquors
Their insatiable gullets.
  Some were dicing and were staking
Many a valuable wager,—
Wrangling, boasting, often cursing,
Sometimes winning, sometimes losing.
Others chatted asking questions,
Personal adventures telling,—
Played droll tricks or told wild stories,
Also sought with curious riddles

Or with cunning feats and juggling
Many marvels to exhibit.
  By themselves sat all the women,
Listened, chatted or exposed their
Gauds and ornaments for barter.
Many girls were gaily strolling
Locked together arm in arm, and
'Twas a charming sight to witness
How they stood in knots and giggled,—
How brunettes with marbly blondines,
Swarthy with the pale contrasted.
  Pairs of young folk got together,
Merry and mischievous laughing,—
Sparkling black eyes cast on all sides
Flashing magic-working glances.
'Gainst his chosen sweetheart's bosom
Here a youth his head was pillowing,—
On the knee of her belovéd
There was seated some young beauty.
  'Mid the crowd reclined Spervogel
On a blanket, and regarded
With great pride and satisfaction
All his merry folk around him.

  All harmonious were and friendly,
And their simple buoyant natures
Interchanged 'mong one another
Jokes and pleasantries for pastime.
  "Fiddle King! do tell,"—said Wickpot,
One of the most hardened topers,—
" 'Mong those heathen had you sometimes
Nice roast meats, like these, on skewers?"
  "Never a bit, thou ancient grimbeard!"
Laughed Spervogel,—"all our game teeth

Had perforce to be extracted,—
Mainly crumbs were all we picked up."
"Well then, eulogize I cannot
That much vaunted land,"—cried Mukkolf,
The performing bear's proprietor.
"I have heard that pretty women
Live among those heathen people,"—
Spoke up then a merry dancer.
"With the women didn't bother,
Gipsy Hazika! Couldn't see them,
Since they kept their faces covered,"—
Said Spervogel as he rose up.
With the oldest of the assemblage,
Düring, a gray headed stroller,
Long Spervogel's friend and crony,
To the shade he then retired.
"Would it please thee, madame Frigga,"—
Questioned Stronghand,—"if thy Frowin,
Like those pagans, had a score of
Darling sweethearts like thy own self?"
"Couldn't find a score like Frigga,"—
Chimed in Winli the trapezzist;—
"Wouldn't be the first nor last one
'Mong a crowd of twenty sweethearts,"—
Proud retorted handsome Frigga.
"That would just suit you, Zachaeus!"
Laughed out Sevenhairs, a fiddler,
Coarse and florid as to visage,
Very few hairs on his cranium.
"You old rooster!" cried Zachaeus;
"What kept you from going crusading?
Here you can't get absolution
For your countless sins, if even
Pleaded on your part a bishop."

Sevenhairs replied: — "I manage
Nicely by myself; — I whistle
Every evening paternosters
Seven times o'er, but excepting
Fridays, when from pious fasting
I grow weak and cannot whistle."
"Fasting? Thou? How long has that been?"
Laughed out handsome black eyed Hiltrud,
Dazzling milk-white teeth displaying.
"Friday fasting,— Sunday reading,
Makes one holy,"— said the Preacher; —
"But *exceptis excipiendis*!"
Added he, and kept on eating.
Egged him from another quarter
Enzemann, the strolling gamester,
Who was one eyed, but to make up
With three shoulders was provided.
"You old cheat and cunning drain purse,
Such a sucker, — bar room bummer!
Dare you talk about salvation?
Read you cannot, and I never
Fasting saw you in my lifetime,—
Saving that one blesséd time when
We were nabbed and ornamented
For awhile the stocks at Boppard."
"Yes, old hunchback! Recollect it
Well enough,—'twas your accurséd
Dice play got us jugged and punished; —
I believe, some day not distant
Up the ladder I shall play you,
Where the crows will light upon you
And your shock hair part and polish."
"Keep your tempers! you are only
Throwing burrs at one another!"

Cried out Krafto, a trapezzist; —
"Many call on God as father
Who would never dream of calling
Me their brother; — our poor pennies
Make us wicked, make us sinners,
Pointing straight to Hell's damnation.
High priced soul-reposing masses
Are beyond our power to pay for; —
Gold,— it grows not on the bushes,
Nor does honey drip from nettles.
And when one of us is injured,
He is but allowed to punish
His insulter's flimsy shadow; —
Strollers are like birds of passage."
"Yes, it is a right as crooked
As a sickle,"— said Zachaeus,—
"And the priesthood arrogate them
That the fringe around their noddles
Is a shining crown of glory; —
So the holy fathers gobble
All things by buyers and sellers
Rated best of all earth's bounties.
And the stupid peasant people
Are content with crumbs and leavings,
And before a zephyr tremble
If it only blows from cloisters.
Let a stroller but approach them,
And pick up what to the poorest
Is not worth a maravedi,—
Like a chorister he bawls out,
Runs to judges, makes complaint and
On them as our sentence urges
That our right arms and our left legs
Straightway shall be amputated.
If we had not 'mong the women

Some support, 'twould be quite risky."
"O Zachaeus! all the backing
'Mong the women we can count on
Is quite doubtful,"—put in Mukkolf;—
"Women like not ancient graybeards,
And they often keep us waiting
Hours upon their very last words."
Cried out Stronghand;—"Very last words?
No such thing among the women;—
And they look at us so loving,
Just as if they were at bottom
Never capable of falsehood,—
But they're shameless and unstable
As the sea and sand and all else
Which the winds move,—that is my mind!"
"And whose fault is that? The men's fault!"
Cried one of the younger women.
"Yes—the men's fault, men's fault, men's fault!"
Echoed loud from every quarter.
"How men treat us from our childhood,—
That must rightly be considered.
If to one we are attracted,
What a talking and a whispering
Just for pleasurable pastime!
Then you aim to overcome us
Straightway with your ardent glances,
Falsehoods tell us,— we're the first ones
And the only,— then you ask us
If to love you we will yield us;—
But a prudent woman does not
Rashly tell her little secrets."
Winli broke in;—"Pleasant falsehoods
In my judgment are not wicked;—
That's no reason why the women,

Men to punish when they do love,
Should condemn to tiresome longing."
"Gracious God in Heaven!" pleaded
An old matron,—arms a-kimbo,—
To the circle's centre stalking.
"Stop your quarrels everlasting!
Young is young! In sooth ye children
Count for nothing,—nor the men-folk
When they're superannuated.
No use fasting now discussing!
Think on't, children! this same Friday
Just consider how ye have fasted!
Are ye pious Christian people,
Or ungodly wretched heathen?"
Then ensued tumultuous laughter,—
One and all, they echoed after:—
"Rightly spoken,— Mother Wilwirk!
Mother Wilwirk, yes, we're heathen!
Strollers were not made for fasting,
We are under no compulsion,—
Strollers draw the line at fasting!"

At that moment from the forest
Came the Fiddle King with Düring,
Place resuming in the circle.
"Hello, Jonas,"— cried out Wickpot;
"Canst thou not the story tell us
Of thy doings in the Orient?"
All applauded, and Spervogel
Sat him down and told his story:
"Well, at length we quitted Venice,—
Counting full four thousand helmets,
With ten times as many soldiers

Who were not of noble lineage,
And a crowd of hinds and pilgrims.
The Venetians, commerce seeking,
Very crafty trading people,
Used our might for their advantage;
First the strong and walléd city,
Zara, must we for them conquer,—
And we had to pass the winter
For that purpose in Dalmatia.
In the early spring again we
Put to sea, but 'twas a long time
Ere we ever got to Syria.
  Sailing through the Helespontine
At Abydos we all landed,
The whole army to assemble;
Then we sailed up the Propontis,
Where a paradise unfolded
Gradually to our vision.
From the deep blue waters rose up
Great Byzantium with its cupolas,
Numerous towers, lofty stone walls,
Mosques and gardens, splendid palaces,
As a miracle unequalled;—
Thither were our ships directed.
  Isaac Angelos, the emperor,
Who had been by his own brother
First dethroned and later blinded,
Through his son had asked assistance
'Gainst the rebel Grecian people;
Fierce assaults and desperate battles
Were delivered ere the invaders
Into full possession entered
Of Constantinople City.

After fully a whole year of
Fighting both on land and ocean
And monotonous investment,
We then stormed and took the city,—
Robbed and plundered it at pleasure ;
Baldwin then, the Duke of Flanders,
Was selected, and we crowned him
Emp'ror of the Latin Kingdom.
Our successes consternation
And affright had spread around us,
And 'twas easy for the princes
And the barons with few soldiers
In the neighboring sea-coast country
Land and titles to acquire.
In that way the army broke up
And was scattered, few arriving
In the land of Syria ; — 'mong these
I was one, but nigh to Antioch
Those few by the sultan's forces
Very near were cut to pieces.
'Scaping death by just a hairsbreadth
Haste we made for France to set out,
And at last,— most five years absent,
Once more saw the Rhine Stream flowing."

When the Fiddle King had finished,
After pond'ring a few moments
Sevenhairs said :— "Tell me one thing,—
If it is such merry pastime,
Constant fighting and no boodle ; —
One's hands always in one's own hair,
Pulling, scuffling,— nothing gaining,
That brings headache,—such as makes the
Heavens above seem copper colored."

"Pull out hair from shiny baldpates,
Were a miracle,"—said Zachaeus,
"And you told me,—every Monday
As a rule your little head ached."
"He who the deep Ocean salted
Will to my slight peccadillos
And poor me extend his mercy,"—
Answered Sevenhairs;—"Ask Jonas
What he gained by parting from us,—
Parchings, hunger, thirst and slashes."
"Yes, and I hope goodly boodle,
Pillage is like finding money,"—
Laughed out Enzemann, while stealing
At Spervogel sidewise glances,
Meantime in his pocket fondling
Dice and dicebox, his purveyors.
Spoke the blondine, Smaragdine;—
"Now then tell us of Tannhäuser,
Henry, Knight of Ofterdingen,
Who so highly famed and praised is,
Both as champion and as minstrel."
"Are you there, my pretty viper?
Just to kiss him are you aching?
My good damsel!"—laughed Spervogel;
Just to see him would surprise you,
And congeal almost your heart's blood.
What I of myself related
Fits the Knight of Ofterdingen,—
We were quite inseparable.
Where he went there went I also,
Was his shield and helmet bearer,
Had the care of his good charger,
In his tent or in the open
Always made his bed to sleep on,—

For his comfort looked out always,
As he also for my welfare;—
And I tell you,— such good lances
In all Europe are not plenty.
Risking life as if 'twere nothing,
Like a raging desert lion
He was always foremost fighting.
  At the desperate final storming
Of Constantinople ramparts
'Mong the very first he mounted
On the walls;— there we were parted,
Since I found 'twas quite impossible
For poor me to keep beside him.
Seemed to me as if his armor
Had grown wingéd,— like chain lightning
In the mêlée his sword glittered.
But I shortly came across him,
Would you think it? — at the head of
Our most hardy bravest soldiers.
Surcoat, armor and his weapons
With red blood were soiled and stiffened,—
His in part but more his enemy's; —
Then there came the hardest fighting.
  In the famous Blachern Palace,
Which with battlements and towers
Was surrounded and defended,
There were several hundred Grecians
Who sharp arrows, balls from mortars,
Boiling oil and blazing firebrands
Showered down on us crusaders.
By assault to take the Blachern
'Twas determined,— and a carnage,
Such as I had never witnessed,
By both parties was engaged in.

Desperation fired the enemy,—
Spurred us pride and thirst for vengeance.
Dire assaults were now delivered,
Always with repulses meeting;—
With their flowing life-blood crimsoned
Heaps of dead lay all about us.
Later gained we the interior,
Step by step our pathway making
'Midst the Grecian execrations.
When inside the spacious hallway
We had closed with the survivors,
Breast and breast to them opposing,
In the street was heard a shouting,
And now we were fast imprisoned.
Of our foemen a great torrent
Came to help their own companions,—
Reinforcements, thousands, thousands.
What we won had with such effort
Must we hold fast 'gainst the enemy,—
And again broke out the contest,
More than ever fiercely raging.
Room to make for desperate fighting
We dragged out the numerous corpses
From the hallway, and we heaped them
'Gainst the outer gates as barriers.
Still, though we ourselves defended,
—As at bay the hunted wild boar—
Always to replace the fallen
Sprung up new come adversaries,
And we now were in extremis.
Sudden, smoke rushed in upon us,
For the palace walls were blazing,—
Set on fire at all four corners.
Steadily the fire drew nearer,

Snapping, crackling in the interior; —
Through the clouds of smoke and vapor
Flared the yellow tongues of fire,
Hungry licking at the pillars.
Walls were cracking, crepitating,
And the very floor beneath us
And the rafters burned and smouldered.
  'Mid the rushing crushing tumult
And the war cries of the Grecians
Our side's battle cry defiant
Weak and weaker was becoming.
All our hope and resolution
Had most vanished when our champion,
Henry, Knight of Ofterdingen,
Like a sword begirded angel
Giant-statured, giant-powered,
Once more closed with exhortations
Fast to stand and fight all comers;
And so valiant did he bear him,
Death despising, the main entrance
Soon he cleared of adversaries.
In his peril I stuck by him,
And with my old fiddle slasher
Dealt such bloody strokes in battle,
Many sank down at the gateway,
By artistic fiddling vanquished.
  Finally we found salvation.
Driven back by fresh crusaders
Now at hand in 'whelming numbers
Were the Greek incendiaries;
Those of us who still were breathing
Saved our lives and dragged our bodies
Out of that consuming palace.
  When Tannhäuser and myself were

From our wounds but just recovered,
We set out for distant Syria,—
Had some more hard fights at Antioch,
For it was his heart's desire
At the Tomb of the Redeemer
In Jerusalem to worship ; —
But it could not be accomplished.
  Later we returned together
On the same ship, and he now is
At the court of good King Philip
As a true and staunch defender
Of the Hohenstaufen monarch.
Soon I then obtained a furlough,—
In my bosom felt a longing
To behold my old-time children,
And to know if still existed
Stroller's art and merry ballads
Which I cherish ; — then I called you
All to Spessart, and here am I ! "
  " Fiddle-King,— old trusty fellow !
Body and soul are at thy service ! "
All called out, and with great ardor
Pressed his hands with heart-felt greeting.
  " Darling Fiddle-King ! " laughed Hazika,
Roguish ; — " I have heard said often
That Tannhäuser,— God protect him!
With the ladies has *bonnes fortunes* : —
'Mong the Greek girls was he also
In love matters as victorious
As he was with sword in battle? "
  " That I know not! — if I knew it
Would not tell you," — sharp he answered ;—
At that laughed inquisitive Hazika.

On the roadway was approaching
Now a heavy-laden wagon,—
With round bulging barrels freighted
Filled with strong beer cool and potent.
When Spervogel some days previous,
To the town of Spessart journeying,
At Aschaffenburg had halted,—
There he had the beverage purchased
And the driver also hired
Opportunely to transport it
All the way to Geier Mountain,—
With refreshing malted liquor
To provide his friends the strollers.
  Very welcome was the present,
And with noisy exultation
Danced and skipped the crowd assembled.
Everybody volunteered
To unload that very instant,
And a sight of empty pitchers
Suddenly were seen among them,—
As if from the trees above them,
—Like so many nuts or acorns—
They had fallen;—then the barrels
In the forest glade were scattered
And by tipplers quick surrounded.
  Everywhere prevailed good order;—
Round the tapsters who were chosen
To serve out the precious fluid,
—And whose tasks were far from easy—
No unseemly pushing was there.
Sevenhairs beamed satisfaction,
And his eyelids wider opened,
Always wider, as he on-looked,

Noting how all hands were hurrying,—
All those heavy barrels moving
To the most convenient places.
"My dear children,"—said he, smirking;—
"Autumn breezes always dry up
All the wet in men and women;—
As for me,—in my long gullet
Is a smooth and open channel
Downward leading, and I'm troubled
Much with wind upon my stomach,—
Therefor fill my tiny pitcher;—
Fiddle-King! we'll not forget thee!
Live the King of all us fiddlers!"
Then throughout the woods resounded
Acclamation universal,
By prevailing silence followed
While all hands were busy drinking.
Once more mounted then Spervogel
To his sylvan seat of honor
And—an ornamented drink-horn
Holding up with arm extended—
There he stood a real monarch
'Mong his people,—while quite distant
Reached the stroller's powerful utterance.
"Let us drink in special honor
Of our craftsmen!—all who wander
Free as air along the highways,—
All who have no home to care for
But are true and honest hearted,—
All who live by daily labor
Or to music are devoted,—
Be belovéd, praised and greeted!— — —
Now then,—who can ballads sing us?"
Instantly arose the sounds of

Many instruments intoning,
Quavering,— clattering all together.
Hats and caps were wildly tossed up,
Heads up-perked and hands erected,—
Fiddle bows waved frantically
In the air,— and all was tumult; —
"I, and I, and I can sing you!
Old time verses and the latest,
Dancing tunes and lovers' ditties,
Drinking songs and pretty ballads!
Strollers sang throughout the country
Long before from us knights learned it!
Fiddle King, let me sing — first one!
No pick me! I know the finest!
But 'tis I,— know all the newest!"
"Gently, children!" cried the old man; —
"For priority no wrangling!
Every one shall have his trial."
Now begun a merry concert,
Ever lively, never irksome; —
In succession all the singers
Asked to sing were by Spervogel: —
Lively songs and ballads bubbled,
But the best ones sung old Jonas.

*

Couriers sendeth genial May
That we mayn't forget her,
Us invites to frolic gay
In this pleasant weather.
Strollers push their fiddle bows,
Listen,— darling little Rose!

Rest thyself within my arms,
I will guard my treasure,—

Youthful love and youthful charms
Age looks on with pleasure.
Lightsome foot with light heart goes,
Trip it,—darling little Rose!

From thy ruby lips one kiss
Must thou not deny me,
Deem not my request amiss
And do not defy me.
Give and take, be not afraid,
Smile on me, dear little maid!

*

Little fish
In the brook
I had almost netted,
But, ker swish,—
Like a spook
Fishling from me scooted.

Birdie brown
That so * *leste*
Hops from twig to twiglet,
Held it down
On its nest,
But it did escape me.

Little maid,
Running so
I at last have caught thee,—
Penance great,
Wont let go,
For thou art a poacher.

* nimble

Stole in play
My love away,
Not at all a trifle,—
Thee I implore
My heart restore,
Or thine own surrender!

*

Once on a time I knew a maid
Whose laugh was made of posies,
Wherever she walked, wherever she staid,
She laughed miraculous roses.
If she but smiled both hill and dell
Were filled with roses instantly,—
Their leaves, by thousands round me fell
As deep, as deep as ankle high.

I saw her walking once alone
And followed up the maiden,
Of love I wished to make sweet moan
And my woes had unladen;—
What did she then? Instantly she
Red roses laughed and barred my way;—
In them I stood with blank dismay,
As deep, as deep as over my knee.

She laughed and laughed, the roses flew
In spite of all my weeping,—
The heap of roses round me grew,
Forever heaping, heaping.
Naught else but red my eyes could see,
And in my dire necessity
The thorns and roses made me smart
As high, as high as my sick heart.

In every place where she appeared
Sweet music followed after,
A thousand silvery bells were heard
Besides this maiden's laughter: —
And all men who the roses saw
With the fair maid fell deep in love,
As deep, as deep,— Oh, what a bore!
In love they fell their ears above.

*

A wretched little man I knew,
His heart was wretched too,—
Because his sweetheart passed him by
And did his suit deny.
Her heart was hard as pebble stones
Nor listened to his moans,—
Thou wretched little man,— next week
Thou canst another seek!

From house to house he stole sadly,—
"Please God to pity me!
Will never a maiden show her face
And give me a sweet embrace?"
Then 'gainst the panes one gently rapped
And with her fingers tapped: —
Look! Look! Of girls there is no dearth,—
More maids there are on Earth!

The second greeted with a kiss,
The first thought that amiss,—
With groans and tears her days were spent,
Until he did relent.
To save his life he could not tell
Which one to choose as belle,—
Hurrah! thou merry little man,
Now hast thou two of them!

Ho for a life undimmed by tears,
Unclouded by reflection!
To set his sail whoever fears
Will never reach safe harbor.
One day drudge and next day king
And a drink between times,—
A pack of cards is just the thing,
Thus I tell my fortunes.

Ace of Spades brings debt along,
Knave of Clubs brings lashes,—
King of Diamonds wine and song,
Queen of Hearts means Venus.
Seven's unlucky,— all right three,—
Five means honest living,—
Witchcraft is diablerie,
Red is unforgiving.

If thou askest what my stem,
Call it what thou pleasest!
Much prefer a hole in hem
To a hole in body.
When I shear a golden fleece
'Tis a blest occasion,—
My griping thirst to quench in peace
Is my benediction.

Fill me up my big round glass
Marked with greenish stripings,
Such a flood of tears en masse
Is the best of penance.
Tipplers' pardons I've a mind
Round the Earth to carry,—
In my glass I pardon find
For sins seventy-seven.

Now listen to a bran new *lied,
A sanctifying measure,—
Should it not prove first class indeed,
'Twill yet add to our pleasure.
With jolly love, and hating well,
My heart is wildly beating,—
Like new made wine in this old shell
On which the hoops I'm driving; —
Around about
I turn devout,
Now thou art driven, stay there!

If thou would'st rightly understand,
Since I've attained to manhood
No other one in all the land
I prize like to the †kellner.
For where he goes somewhat he finds
Like honey bee 'mong flowers,—
And soon returned to me he brings
What in his tankard splashes; —
Around about
I turn devout,
Do not be refractory!

My hat I toss up in the air
And kick my shoes off also,—
As butterflies the flowers share
Myself I'll nourish likewise.
In turn he looks me in the face; —
Dear chum! what vintage art thou?
Though knife and fork art out of place
At least I can engulf thee;—
Around about
I turn devout,—
Whether red or white wine.

* Song
† Walter

And if you ask my pleasure pet
I'll tell you in an instant,—
I'm dead in love with all that's wet,
And it must run in rivers.
Whoever makes me sit aside
With parched up throat, and poorly,—
Potz pestilence, and plague beside!
I'll pay him off full surely;—
Around about
I turn devout,—
Brooklet,—flow my way now!

* * *

In the early red of morning
All were stirring, all were packing,—
For departure getting ready;—
Then dispersed on distant journeys
Peacefully and quite contented.
Brief indeed were their leave-takings,
No one wept because of going,—
No one asked;—"where shall I go to?"
As the strollers met together
They broke up and separated,—
To the winds of Heaven dispersing.

*

II

PARCIFAL

The clouds of war as yet were hovering
Around Germania's homes and fields,
And helmets many yet were covering
The knights behind their battle shields.
Great armies fought and dukes contended,
Bishops denied the sacrament,—
In all directions couriers wended
With many a roll of sealed parchment.
Since Henry's death while on the throne
Had lapsed ten years of constant warring,
And still around the imperial crown
Went on the feuds of prince and baron.
Here Philip, there Otto! Here Hohenstaufen,
There Guelfs! was yet the battle cry,—
Nor free indeed from base corruption
Were Church and Aristocracy.
Ambitious Rome kept on intriguing
And constant played its cunning rôle—
And banned or flattered, secret leaguing,
To rule the world its only goal.

But final rested with the legions
Of the Hohenstaufen victory,
And vanished from those blood-stained regions
At once the previous anarchy.
'T was at Cologne; with his supporters
Procured and paid with English gold,—
Otto was camped in bastioned quarters,
Hotly besieged by Philip bold.
Upon one of their numerous sallies
The Guelfs were lured with feignéd flight
To Waffenberg, where Philip's ällies
Struck Otto with such 'whelming might,
That seeing his cause was quite defeated
To English soil he fled away,
And Cologne suppliant humbly pleaded
For grace, accepting Philip's sway.
Sonorous Easter bells were pealing
The fête-day for which now took place,
And Philip held his court imperial
Within the walléd city's space.
A king he was in every fashion,
Of countenance and stature rare,—
His deep blue eyes' benign expression
Was well set off by blonden hair.
His features manifested kindness
Combined with valor's eagle glow,—
Greatest his disposition's mildness,
So merciful to every foe.
If possible crowns to embellish
With costlier gems than diamonds rare,
If yet remains some prize to relish
Riches above and kingdoms fair,—
'T was truly so with Swabian Philip,
For at his side in peace and war

A consort walked, gracious and princely,
Pure virgin gold excelling far;
The Rose without a Thorn, Irene,
A Princess high of Eastern birth,
His imperial rule assisted sweetly,
And with truest affection girt
The throne of Earth's supremest governor.
  She came, and every soul was glad,
E'en sinners could not help but love her;
She went, and Heaven's face turned sad.
Sun, moon and stars, the royal couple
Ruled side by side with kingly might,—
And glorious beamed with lustre double
Their bright effulgence day and night.

  At court, where gathered many revelers,
In Contra dance and Tuteley
Was one alone 'mong knights and cávaliers
The cynosure of every eye.
Princes and king to him were gracious,
His friendship courted all the men,—
The women all esteemed as precious
Each passing word vouchsafed to them.
  That knight was Henry Ofterdingen
Whose name now everywhere was known,
As if on some invisible pinion
To every nook his fame had flown.
How at the Bosphorus he fulmined,
At Antioch with ardor burned
Its walls before and towers culmened,—
And how at length, homeward returned,
To fight for Philip naught he tarried
But 'neath Brabant's archducal crown
At Waffenberg his lance had carried
The chiefest honors,— this was known.

Besides, this celebrate patrician,
Who Fortune bound with iron hand,
A poet was and skilled musician
Whom few could match in German Land.
  Tannhäuser took what him was offered,
Contentedly indifferent,—
But yet the adulation proffered
Spurred up his eager temperament.
Great reputation now he counted,
His conscious breast was filled with pride,—
Since every barrier was surmounted
What wonder if with vision wide
His restless soul ambition fired,
And limitations stopped not for,—
Or if to accomplish things he aspired
Beyond his strength and Nature's law.
  The last five years of his existence
In the Orient, and German strife,
Had brought such manifold experience
Of storm and stress and martial life,
— All which, to memory now present,
So earnest echoed in his breast—
That tedious 't was and sheer unpleasant
At Court to dally in idle rest.
  The courtiers he as far transcended
In genius as in martial fame,—
The women scarce their hearts defended
Against his overpowering name.
To pass his time and fill his leisure
Sometimes he flirted for his pleasure,—
But none there was of all the sex
Who suited him in all respects.
  More exigent than with Ricchezza,
Home from the East he had returned,—

His being thrilled the same old measure,
Since for transcendent love he burned.
In slothful ease he found no pleasure,
Restless ambition urged him on,—
To soar he wished high in the azure,
And like a flood his course to run.
  Strive on he must and all things venture,
And everywhere take rank as first,—
And since there was no foe to conquer
His mind he occupied with verse.
What long he had forsworn — campaigning —
That did he now,— compose — to wit,—
And books he bought, at home remaining
Romance to read, on parchment writ.
  There hung his sword, his shield was next it,
His battered helm with dents was marred,—
To a near smithy he had sent it;
Now lightly clothed in peaceful garb
The floor he paced, — then looked from window,
By what he read much plagued in mind,—
Then coming back the book peered into,
Which, opened, he had left behind.
And lastly, o'er the table bending,
His fist he clenched with spiteful look,—
And pressed it in the volume's centre
Upon the monastery book.
  "The greatest poem that man has written,
Beyond the wit of man almost,—
Must either hate or cordial like him,
The author who this book composed!
Shall he such glorious verses publish
Which rack my heart with jealous care,—
While I am content to scribble rubbish,
Nor godlike epic boldly dare?

His verse recalls the crash of lances,
And bugle call and trumpet bray; —
They pierce me through, these godlike
stanzas,
Like point of lance in battle fray.
Whoever wrote it, I must find him
And challenge to a test of skill
As sharp as e'er with sword I've been in;
'Twixt us such strife determine will."
Thus day by day he waxéd wrother,
That thought pursued him as a spell; —
Wolfram von Eschenbach was author,
The wondrous book was Parcifal.

So from the Court he asked a furlough
And royal Philip made reply,—
"As I thyself shall ever value,
For helm and shield forget not me!
Unwillingly I grant thy absence,
Thy wish to leave thy post at Court
Is not such welcome sound as crash of
My enemies' spears in battles fought.
God be thy shield and guardian constant
If ever menace fortunes black!
Our well beloved friend and cousin,
Duke Hermann, greet at Eisenach."
Most graciously the Queen Irene
Her head inclined; —"You have my wish,
Your heart may always tell you plainly
The surest path to happiness!"
His leave he took, by all lamented,
With buoyant heart embarked alone,—
And with his steed and arms was ferried
The Rhine across from fair Cologne.

' Twas Spring, and on the hillsides wooded
Shrilled forth each warbler's merry call,—
He heard them not, but moody brooded
Upon the poem of Parcifal.
Prone on the grass he was reclining,
—His saddle laid beneath his head—
The setting sun illumined, shining,
The green-gold boughs above him spread.
In dreamy moody contemplation
He lay upon a shaded knoll,
And giving vent to his emotion
' Twas thus communed he with his soul.
"Wolfram! in every pulse and artery
Thy noble verse I envy thee,—
Thy imperial art and godlike mastery
Which heroes limn thus wondrously.
Full half my life I've spent, and striven,
And lying here I blush for shame
To think as yet I naught have written,
Sufficing to preserve my name.
Thy book is like a polished mirror
From which to me an image speaks,—
My wavering mind it fills with terror,
Such impress deep thy genius makes.
Thy hero in the Grail cup glowing
Sought pure belief and spirit food,
From the emerald vase mystic outflowing,
Once filled with the Redeemer's blood.
In life's sealed book I am blindly groping,
Questing another magic word,—
But I, in spite of all my hoping,
Am halting still on dreams deferred.
Nowhere on Earth have I discovered
Wherewith to cure my restless heart,—

Thought I to have it, quick 't was shattered,
Inflicting yet another smart.
  What profits pleasure transitory,
Which, scarcely born, is instant lost?
What use in passion's fleeting story,
So soon replaced by chilling frost?
The raging flame of gnawing passion
Does that extinguish? — No! — it glows
Eternally, as 'neath the glacier
Down Aetna's side the lava flows.
  In vain my ardent thoughts I question,
Which first deceptive charm, then wring,—
Where is the Holy Grail of Passion
Which also crowns its chosen king?
If called to be its tried defender
Whose duty 't were to guard it well,
I'd be the most believing Templar
That ever such a task befel.
  If goblin hideous had possession,
I were not dumb like Parcifal,—
The fiend I'd face and boldly question; —
Is this the place? — Is this the Grail?
As King Amfortas pined and suffered
When wounded by the bloody lance,
My heart can only be delivered
From its distress by a loving glance.
  A poor heart-sufferer was my mother,
Who — dying — left her child behind,—
In coat of mail I know I'll never
Contentment find or peace of mind.
Could I this planet now remodel,
Its present form I would retain,—
But human quarrels, avarice, robbery,
To make an end of I were fain.

Would I could live my life ideal!
Thoughts transitory as the day
Should take on form and substance real
At my command and sovereign sway.
Of all things on this spacious planet
Most precious is the sex's love,—
Until its nature I have fathomed
My thirsting soul must ever rove.
King I would be and rule all women,
Love's fiefdom regulate to taste,—
And what as conqueror I won me
Should not be mean or commonplace.
Delusive dreams, audacious hoping,
My tense desire can never quench,—
A sea of rapture I would float in,
By joys entranced, in pride of strength.
Rest I shall never know, while living,
Until I've plumbed Love's deepest well,—
And if vouchsafes it not High Heaven,
I'll seek it in some pact with Hell.

By this the stars were brightly twinkling,
In thickets sang the nightingale,—
Tannhäuser half asleep was thinking
On Wolfram's poem of Parcifal.
Soon in the forest fell he slumbrous,
His horse laid down beneath the trees,—
And to his presence stealing — wondrous —
In dreams a novel sight he sees.
Sudden appeared a vision radiant,
And floating light the dew upon
Came — goddesslike and scant of raiment —
A beauteous woman wafted on.

With languishing appealing glances
Motions to follow her the fair,—
With smiling countenance advances,
Then faded into misty air.
At break of day his gallant stallion
The knight bestrode with lance and spur,—
But when securely poised in saddle
The fractious creature would not stir.
He stood as if to that spot rooted,
And snorted, reared upright, and blew,—
Until no more the point was mooted,
And under spur away he flew.
As underneath the shading branches
The horse his noble rider bore,
The wild-rose thorns and noxious brambles
The borders of his mantle tore.
"How now? — Is here a treasure buried,
Watched over by some spectre wench?
Was't that which my good stallion flurried?
The prick of roses makes one blench.
But we must on to other pleasures,
Belovéd steed that bearest me!
On roses, more than golden treasures,
Dotes every minstrel devotee."
So ran his heedless thoughts, and galloping
The sunshine in quite free from care,
Refreshed and eagerly he drank in
Thuringia's cooling forest air.
Soon he arrived at Ludwig's smithy;
"Praise God! — I pray thee, be not wroth!
My work I've long time shirked,— 'tis pity,—
Master, what ho! — to amuse us both
Lend me thy clout,— truly it meant is,—
Allow me at thy forge to stand,—
A blacksmith's cavalier apprentice
Is something new in Austrian Land."

So saying, the glowing steel and hammer
He quick caught up with practised skill,—
And worked away with ringing clangor,
Both boy and master making smile.
"There 'tis!—It was a pleasant trial
Of what taught me extremity;—
Useful the art,—there's no denial,
It nourished thee and sheltered me."
With that he quickly sprang in saddle,
And in a single hour's round
He came across a lonely castle,
Which crowned a conelike wooded mound.
At him it peeped among the bushes
In gallant and baronial style,
And seemed to express its owner's wishes
That he should come and rest awhile.
But on he kept along the brawling
Meand'ring Erb stream in the vale,
And as it widened saw before him
A mountain like a frowning wall.
That it should rise—verdure defying—
With its adjacent craggy spur,
To him seemed strange, and near him spying
An agéd crone, he questioned her.
"Why, don't you know?"—replied the bel dame,—
"Good Sir!—a visit there will pay!
In its interior not seldom
Is heard the sound of music gay.
The Hörselberg that is, and dwell there
Sweet Mistress Venus and her crew,—
They carry on and bravely revel there
All day, and through the night-time too."
"There Venus dwells!"—Blank gazed Tannhäuser
Now at the cliff, then at the face

Of the ancient hag, a jest supposing,—
Then rode away with quickened pace.
"And so to Venus' magic kingdom,"
Said he,—"I am really very near,—
And from this humdrum Earth's dominion
One step will find the goddess there!
Suppose I try it!—Shall I venture?
Last eve 't was Venus beckoned me,—
Suppose I asked, would she make answer,
Where Love springs fresh—eternally?"
The mountains' utter desolation
Warned him against such rash emprise,
But more allured that invitation
As he approached the mountain's sides,—
Which massive, lofty upward towered,
While in the sun's clear morning rays
Forbidding and repulsive lowered
The Hörselberg before his gaze.
"Among those deep and gaping crevices,
Where can the hidden gateway be?
And what the magic "Open Sesame,"
All barriers to pierce for me?"
Thus mused Tannhäuser,—gazing earnest
Where bleak and drear the mountain showed,
In thought absorbed,—without observing
That on another right-hand road
—Which with his own path soon uniting
Was traversed by a little brook—
Two stranger cavaliers were riding
On high bred steeds,—with martial look.
At length he noticed them,—each bearing,
As he, upon their backs a shield;
Nor they nor he could help observing
Accoutred all were for the field.

Their flutt'ring pennons rustled loudly,
Their steeds were rich caparisoned,—
And to the girths were hanging proudly
Their polished helms with steel rings bound.
They bare themselves like warriors valiant,
Stalwart was one as e'er was seen,—
And like a keen-edged sword in scabbard,
Of haughty and defiant mien.
The furrowed lines upon his forehead
Gave ample proof of earnest thought,—
While like twin planets, bright and lurid,
His dark and piercing eyes blazed forth.
They halt,—perhaps a fight impended,
Perhaps a sharp affray was near;—
But when they saw a harp suspended
At Henry's side—to minstrels dear—
They courteous greeted—lances dipping—
The minstrel knight,—who cried afar;—
"'T is Henry,—Knight of Ofterdingen,—
My native land is Austria."
"Tannhäuser!" shouted both together,
As moved each but one single thought;—
"Blest be the hour which gives such pleasure,
And which to us such joy has brought."
"My name is Biterolf",—explained then
The younger cavalier in black,—
"And I",—to announce the elder deigned then,
"Am Wolferam von Eschenbach."
At that, Tannhäuser's horse 'gan rear,
Feeling his master's spur deep driven;
That famous name struck Henry's ear
As 't were a thunderbolt from Heaven.

The minstrel king him now confronted,
The poet who Parcifal had writ; —
How quick was fled his rancor wonted!
How much he longed to kiss his cheek!
At him he gazed in much confusion,
By his majestic look borne down,—
Nor dared to him to make confession,
He coveted the minstrel crown.
"Wolfram! — through you I send good greeting
Bavaria to,"— Tannhäuser said; —
"That land the Alpine glaciers meeting,—
Where German Song its cradle made."

Returning from a friendly tourney
Were Biterolf and Eschenbach,—
And now the high born minstrel trio
Together kept their common path.
With kindly mien and courteous deference
Each questioned each or swift replied,—
Each showing each the greatest reverence,
As chatting they rode side by side.
At last, as the evening sun was sinking,
They saw upon the tree-crowned height
The sunlight in, majestic blinking,
The Wartburg towers glittering bright.

III

WARTBURG CASTLE

A jewel in Thuringian Land,
Gleams like a helmet — verdure clad —
The battlemented Wartburg grand,
High perched upon the mountain's head.
The citadel on bare rock founded,
Its sheer steep walls and massive gate,
Its gables and its turrets rounded
The verdant valley dominate.
A noted landmark towering high,—
Like furbished shields it glitters bright
When golden-red in the evening sky
Its windows mirror back the light.
The warders call and trumpets sound,
While come and go a throng of cavaliers
With spurs on foot and swords girt round,
New comers some,—some homeward travelers.
From all directions visitors gather,—
Some come on foot and some on horse;
Strollers and poets and knights come hither,
And all find welcome at the *schloss.

Castle

Duke Hermann carefully maintained
The might of his ancestral stem,—
Honored and feared in German Land
As independent sovereign
And fond of minstrels, always willing
For them his gates to open wide,—
Largesse the masses freely giving,
Who Hermann praised on every side.
To entertain the best and greatest
Was his delight, his joy, his pride,—
And Minstrel Art he higher rated
Than noble birth, or aught beside.
In youth to Paris he had drifted
And studied books of every kind;
No royal duke was ever gifted
With subtler or more cultured mind.
From rare old myths and sagas taken
Themes many to the poets he read,
To improve, adapt, or make translation;
Thus at his court much ink was shed.
In his strong box secure reposed
The manuscripts which he possessed;
At night his eyes he never closed
Until from reading forced to rest.
Duchess Sophie, his second wife,
By forty dames attended ever,
The partner of his riper life,
Assisted in his high endeavor.
Court they maintained in royal splendor,—
By both minstrels and poets, unasked,
Were always held in highest honor
And in their princely favor basked.
All mighty minstrels, Heaven inspired,
—No matter what their lot or birth,—

As guests at Wartburg were desired,
Express to recognize their worth.
Henry von Veldeck had composed here,
Who first the earliest seed had sown
Of German minstrelsy and poesy,
From which whole rows of flowers had grown.
  Veldeck was dead, lost to their circle,
But, fostered by the kind Landgraf,
Existed still a famed round table,
And first of all was Eschenbach.
Next, Walter von der Vogelweide,
Reinmar von Zweter, Biterolf
Of Thuringen, who took delight in
The chase of savage boar and wolf.
  Sir Heinrich, born to noble station,
Often the "Virtuous Author" named,—
And known throughout the German Nation
As minstrel, and as warrior famed.
Anhalt's Archduke, the Bear's descendant,*
Albrecht von Halberstadt, scholar,—
Who Ovid's fabulæ resplendent
Translated had vernacular.
  Herbert von Fritzlar, who the abduction
Of Greek Helen had versified,
A song of Troy,—and Botenlauben
Count Otto, of Hennegau the pride;
And others of the German Nation,
Of good old stem and lineage high,—
Quite as expert in versification
As tourney in and chivalry.
  Play-actors too and strolling singers
Were never treated with neglect,
And all the merry ballad bringers
Good store of food and drink there met.

* Albert Margrave of Brandenburg, A. D. 1137, was nicknamed "*The Bear*."

Profusion reigned, each day was festive,
First music, then the javelin,—
'T was always sport and fun and feasting,
And empty goblets never seen.

Quite opportunely came Tannhäuser,
Most heartily was thee'd and thou'd,—
Also was earnestly berated
By the delighted minstrel crowd
Because so long he had been absent;
For all had wished him back again,
To ascertain if in their judgment
He worthy were of his great fame.
Tannhäuser spoke: —"I come with greeting
To see you all and to remain;
A long time past, awake and sleeping,
To accomplish this has been my aim.
Wolfram, 't is thou! — and thy great Epic,
Thy Parcifal,— which clouds my brow
Until we try with weapons equal
Which greater is,— myself or thou!
I prize thee, but bow down before thee
I will not till in earnest strife
With song thou com'st to overawe me;
My challenge lies for all alike.
Come on! — Let us contend in tourney
For minstrel fame! — A noble wage
To battle for with song and poetry; —
My glove I cast! — Who lifts the gage?"
A gloomy hush; — then answered Wolfram:
"Tannhäuser,— God avert such strife!
That I am battle-scarred thou knowest,
For often I have risked my life:

But never heard I 't was in fashion,
— Either in joke or otherwise,—
Supremacy to urge with passion,
For which no envious poet cries.
Enjoy thy roses, facile gathered,
Which with the fair sex thou hast won ;
My fame by solemn strains is measured,
And thou canst never strike me down."
"Enjoy thy roses facile gathered ? "
Was dire derision now his part ?
His scutcheon spurned, his own self badgered ?
Deep entered in the poisoned dart.
But Walter, grasping the occasion,
Extended him a friendly hand,—
And spite of Wolfram's provocation
Exasperation slowly waned.
"We all refuse thy proffered wager
Because the law 't is of our guild,
All who in minstrel art find pleasure
With it may amuse themselves at will.
But let me observe thee, Fortress Stormer !
Presaging was thy bugle call,
When with his answering horn the warder
Another guest announced to all.
Achieved thou hast renown and station
And learned 'mong folk thy way to win,
Since at Sir Leutold's Castle Sében
Thou wrot 'st thy poem of Luarin.
To me thou seemest stronger, ampler,
Sterner of face,— fairer thou'rt not ;—
The all victorious brave knight templar
His old time friend has not forgot ? "
"O Walter ! — could I e'er forget thee ?
Good care thou took'st thy fame to spread,
When like so many sword-thrusts deadly
Thy songs thou hurl'dst at Innocent's head.

That I of thee was ever mindful
My oath I'll take on bended knee,—
And Reinmar here can tell thee truthful
How much in Vienne I honored thee "
"With love and praise as warm and ringing",—
Said Reinmar,— " both by word and song,
As we did him, when Ofterdingen
From Babenberger Court had gone."
Of Leopold, the Archduke reigning,
They 'gan to talk,— the knight extolled
Him more and more,— to all explaining
Wherefor "*Gloriosus*" he was called.
" He shines as flowers gleam in meadows," —
Said he,— " and great éclat has won; —
With him compared all chiefs are shadows,
He shines 'mong princes like a sun."
The minstrels felt somewhat offended
At so much overplus of praise; —
"In Hermann's soul all virtues blended; " —
All praised his grand and generous ways.
Then Walter spoke: — " Like sunny Maytime
Shines Hermann's kindness far and near;
Bear witness to it priests and laymen,
It stands recorded everywhere.
As ere broad daylight's rosy dawning
The sun is hidden and obscured,
So Leopold, your idol Austrian,
Is overshadowed by our lord.
Disputing waxing sharp and sharper,
The Landgrave Hermann happened by,—
Who stifling the debate with laughter
Soon quieted their rivalry.

Tannhäuser and his horse found lodging
A hostel at in Eisenach,
Before which grew a row of linden;
Of kind attention was no lack.
Thencefrom the Wartburg was quite visible
And on a settle, stretched at length,
The knight was earnestly considering
His late reception's warmth and strength.
He most repented his explosion
Before the noble minstrels all,—
His challenge too — including Wolfram —
As soon as entered in the hall.
But was he not expressly come for
A contest sharp — for good or worse — ?
Was not his peace of mind quite done for
By Eschenbach's transcendent verse?
If he as premier Wolfram reckoned
'Mong devotees of minstrelsy,—
Himself could only rank as second,
However high his muse might fly.
To base submit would not allow him
His eager pride and thirst for fame;
Rather should lightning play about him
Singly enthroned; — such now his aim.
Sooner his life he'd risk and forfeit,
Defeated be and ranked the last,—
Than be with doubt harassed and worried,
If he in song could be surpassed.
Weaken his fixed resolve should nothing,
With Wolfram he must measure skill;
Again he swore it,— unforgotten
Was Wolfram's undisguised ill will.
Should Wolfram's haughty dict confine him
In bounds he scarce was conscious of,

And leaping which he aspired to win him
The laureled crown, all others above.
To write, he wished, a lay heroic:
As yet but versed in lyric art,
Win fame he must as epic poet;
Before him lay an open path.
  As dwarfs may giants never equal,
Luarin could not compare at all
In grace and strength, nor in its sequel,
With Wolfram's Grail-King, Parcifal.
But what was floating 'fore his vision
As yet unborn and slumbrous lay;—
Dim forms and shapes in long procession
Were gradual pushing toward the day.
  Combining many an old tradition
And the experience of his life,
Was ever urging him ambition
To chronicle grand deeds of strife.
This impulse always he rejected
As if his visions shunned the light,
And, deeming immature, neglected
To dare such high Olympian flight.
And Wolfram was quite right to chide him
Pursuing themes his powers beneath,
With madrigals inglorious idling
When higher hung Fame's laureled wreath.
  But yet in them he found such pleasure!
In joy and grief he treasured them
As rosebuds born of summer weather,
Or jewels on his garment's hem.
Should he his chosen path abandon,
Should he his lyre belovéd dash
Against a block of solid granite
At crack of Wolfram's stinging lash?

The selfsame Ofterdingen was he,
Upon whose buckler's circling marge
Around a full blown rose his motto
Was plainly cut in letters large.
His thirst for love was still imperious,
Unquenchable and rooted deep ; —
'T were deprivation very serious
From Passion's theme aloof to keep,
Until at last he had completed
His great ever-enduring work,
Even if fateful 't were him meted
That death should in its pages lurk.
Had not a goddess gracious spoken
His sainted mother to that night,
Of final eminence a token ?
Forget such message benedight?
" His mind's creations live will ever,
The future will acclaim their might,—
Their author's name transpire will never
And comet-like will be his flight."
That prophecy believed Tannhäuser
And felt 't would surely come to pass ;
Posterity the poem should ravish,
But must he then his name suppress ?
Had God so willed it then that never
While living should his name shine bright,
And later that no curious delver
Should bring his Master-work to light?
Consideration to it giving
In cooler blood, 't was very clear
The Wartburg minstrels had received him
With honor and with friendly cheer.
Their love would he repay with pleasure,
And would his old-time life renew,—

And free from care beguile his leisure
With songs and sonnets, old and new.
  The time had come to seek the castle,—
—The evening shades had fallen almost,—
Where for festivity and wassail
Awaited him his noble host.

  With lengthy strides walked Ofterdingen,
Quite lost in thought, o'er moss and stone,—
And stopped when half way up the mountain
Backward to gaze the vale adown.
Afar the valley seemed to close in
As narrow as a new dug grave,—
Hemmed in by granite walls imposing,
A veritable dragon's cave.
  Tannhäuser peered the valley over,
Obeying the impulse of his will,—
Half hoping he might there discover
A dragon to attack and kill;
Or somewhere in a rift or crevice,
Guarded with care by pigmies bold,
Invisible and full of malice,
To find good store of virgin gold.
Then leftward gazing, earnest thinking,
His vision pierced the dusking air,—
And saw the Hörsel spectral blinking,
Deserted, barren, bleak and bare.
  There dwelt the Queen of Beauty, Venus,
Empress of Passion's wild domain,—
Alluring him with fateful impulse
To her enchanted cavern's fane.
If he but knew the password rightful
Before which barriers would give way,
Her portals he would knock at hopeful
And to her presence fly that day,

And glut his vision lustful roaming
Upon her matchless beauties bright,—
And in the arms of handsome women
Dream on and dally day and night.
  Then would at last by Venus' votaries
Be fully solved all doubts for him,
And feminine hearts confess their mysteries,
In low toned whispers answering.
  Thus verity and fancy blending
With which his memory was fraught,
His path he kept, the hill ascending,
Until a stir attention caught.
Then saw he standing near him Wolfram
Awaiting his approach alone,
And hurrying strode he upward to him
And greeted him with hand and tongue.
  "I saw thee down the valley gazing,"
Said Wolfram, "as I oft have done,—
The selfsame questions my soul asking,
But of them cannot answer one.
Seëst thou that nearest constellation
In the illimitable void,
Forever keeping place and station
In the universe, so willed by God?
  Earth puts on green,—the planets float there,
And endlessly runs on the dream ;—
To me explain what forces hold there
Those stars which in High Heaven gleam!
Think'st thou that other beings habit
In yonder islands in the air,—
Revenge deception, kindness value,
Build habitations, tombstones rear?
That pleasures bloom and sorrows madden,
That joys elate and burdens rasp,—

And human brains the enigmas sadden,
Which human wisdom cannot grasp?
  Think'st thou they know the Great Creator
Of Earth and Heaven, of beast and tree,
And on their knees address their Father
With humble faith, as on Earth we?
Is't so? — Or must High Heaven be gainéd
By Christus' might, our archon high?
Does God's Son flit from star to planet,
For men a thousand times to die?
  Consider well these problems awful,
Or if before thou hast pondered them
And foothold found on the Earth unstable,
Give answer if within thy ken.
Whatever was thy soul's conclusion,
To see are human eyes too blind;
Perhaps while thou below wert musing
The same thought entered in thy mind."
  Tannhäuser stood in blank confusion; —
Such questioning to him? — whose soul
A moment since, sunk in illusion,
Was making wanton joys its goal.
  "What seer God's mysteries can fathom?
No man! — perhaps an angel might"
Said he, — "thy mystic questions answer, —
But mortal none 'neath Heaven's light
Who spends his life as seems befitting,
Lives for the moment's transient bliss,
And like the moth o'er flowers flitting
With downy wings, sweet honey sips.
I only treasure what this life here
Affords to make the Earth more gay,
And question not its source or giver
When dawned the first creation day.

On Earth cool forest springs are gushing,
And flowers growing,—graze the herds,—
While mortals to and fro are pushing,
And sweetly carol little birds.
On Earth my steed I sit in battle
And serve for gold some puissant lord,
And by my side suspended rattle
My harp beloved, my trenchant sword.
Delight I find in the signs golden
Which in the heavenly azure roll,—
As sparkling eyes of beauteous women
With mirrored glow enchant my soul.
Friendship and love I esteem as treasures
With which adorns our life kind Fate,—
And bless those happy human pleasures
Which earthly days to me vouchsafe.
On Earth where grateful shade invites me
And not in Cloudland — there above —
My art I practise,—life delights me
And fills my soul with joyous love."
"Therefor our paths are quite divergent,"—
Wolfram replied;—"Mine points direct
The fountain to of strength and mercy,
In dust thou grovel'st, unelect;
Forgettest that where embers smoulder
A little ash heap quickly lies,
And that thy body soon will moulder
Which now to lust devoted is.
O follow me! To the Eternal
Quick turn, ere it shall be too late;
'Fore God's own throne in Heaven supernal
Will be adjudged thy final fate."
"Such dazzling light were surely blinding
To me upon this earthly soil,—

Some Holy Grail thou'rt always finding,
Thou art an incarnate Parcifal,—
Wolfram! — A King and poet royal!
Thy genius mounts as eagles fly; —
In vain thou'lt seek a fellow mortal
Thy flight to follow Heaven-high."
"I cannot claim high rank as scholar,
Exalted lore from me is far,—
But my belief I'll hold and follow,
And ever trust my guiding star."
"And so will I! Who shall decide it,
If twixt us two 't is thou art right,—
Pleasure abjuring, patient biding,
Hoping a future life's delight;
Or I the better lot have chosen,
So bounteous blest by Fortune's hand
With many a beauteous flower broken
In Venus' realm of Fairy Land."
"On that dread day 't will be decided
When the Archangel's trumpet rings,
And every one his sins misguided
Before his gracious arbiter brings.
That day thou'lt hear his utterance solemn,
All sound of horns transcending far,—
The crash of rocks and plinth and column,
And thundrous elemental war.
Then storms will rage and dire commotion,
And fire consume the very air,—
In fragments fly the Earth and Ocean,
And mountains topple everywhere.
Then those who God's commands have followed,
Serene and calm secure will stand
At the right hand of Him All-hallowed,
And join High Heaven's celestial band.

Ah! Woe to thee if thou'rt neglected,
Thy soul's salvation thee denied,—
By angels shunned, outcast, rejected,
Condemned God's judgment to abide;
That damned thou art forever and ever
Because too much Earth thou didst love,
Steeping thy soul in carnal pleasure
Beyond the power of God to absolve!"
Tannhäuser hushed; subdued and terrified
He felt before this mighty man,
Who looking neither right nor left side
The path pursued to Duke Hermann.
Those sharp and threatening words of Wolfram
Had penetrated to his soul,
And even human judgment took on
The aspect of Jehovah's dole.
His thoughts began to shake and stagger
His caravel's careening mast,—
Therefor he sought their weight to shatter
And banish from his mind at last.
And was he then so very wicked?
To deadly crime was he so near
That he had forfeited forgiveness,
And now to meet his judge must fear?
Was he now like that stripling pliant
Lodged in that cave among the tanns?
Was he not grown and self-reliant,
A battle hardened practised lance?
His confidence who thought of shaking,
Or 'gainst him dangerous snares contrived?
Must he, as if from dreams awaking
And to the parting ways arrived,
Furl down his sails with pleasure swollen,
A drear path take without demur?

A mortal like himself was Wolfram,
And just as liable to err.
  He never would ! the Earth still owed him
Much happiness ; — he would await,
Impatiently and naught foreboding,
His guerdon from the hand of Fate.
Nor would he be dame Fortune's plaything,
Nor her gifts take as tendered alms ; —
But confident her smile awaiting
In his pursuit of Venus' charms,
Alone he would all comers conquer
With haughty overbearing force,
And every obstacle ride over
Which barred his fixed imperious course.

  Not long Tannhäuser meditated,
His late confusion now was gone,—
When he and Wolfram, quite belated,
The lofty castle walls had won.
They looked around ; — crimson as fire
The moon above the Hörsel glowed,—
Opened to them the warder's squire,
And through the gates they held their road.

IV

THE REUNION

'T was festal day at Wartburg Castle,
And in the Landgrave's audience hall
The fiddles and the flutes were playing,
And candles gleaming bright on all.
Assembled were knights, minstrels, women,
A joyous scene and full of charm,—
The dark brunette and marbly blondine
Disputed beauty's doubtful palm.
Delaines and worsteds, silks and velvet
The feast set off with pleasing grace,—
Carver and Seneschal and varlet
Were occupied, each in his place.
The Landgrave's household and retainers
Mixed with the guests who now were come,—
And high-born youngsters served the strangers
With greeting draughts, neglecting none.
A buzz prevailed and laughter ringing,
With whispering and pleasant jests,—

As Eschenbach and Ofterdingen
Their entrance made, the last two guests.
Then hushed at once the crowd of visitors,
Each neck was craned in glad surprise,—
"That's he!" was passed around in whispers,
"That one with sharp and piercing eyes!"
  Spoke up at once the Virtuous Author;
"Say, Gentlemen! Why thus belated?
Full many a fair Thuringian daughter
Your coming eager has awaited.
Celestial things wert meditating,
The constellations' heavenly tale?
Or in your ramblings recreative
Wert listening to the nightingale?"
  Significantly gazed those questioned
Each other at, when thus addressed;
Replied Tannhäuser; — "We were hunting
A noble stag which 'scaped our quest.
In rocky clefts one thought 't would tarry
Among the craggy mountain peaks,—
The other tracked the timorous quarry
Along the flower besprinkled meads."
  "A riddle!" cried the Virtuous Author,—
"Now Biterolf, since huntsman thou,
How readest this bizarre enigma,
This cunning hunter's shrewd reply?"
  Said Biterolf,—"'Tis my opinion
They hunted not the selfsame game,—
But each one saw with different vision,
As pictured to his separate brain."
  "Hast hit it, hunter!" answered Wolfram,
"His own path each would fain pursue·"—
The Author then led Ofterdingen
Among the guests, the fête to view.

How graceful Ofterdingen's mantle
Enwrapped his lithe and sinewy form,
Its folds of blue cloth falling ample
Just low enough to keep him warm!
With martin's fur expensive bordered,
And lined throughout with ermine skin,—
The sleeves were richly gold embroidered
And made of yellow baldachin.
His jewel-studded belt supported
A hunting dagger and a sword,—
He looked the hero, welcomed, courted,
All eyes were centred Henry toward.
The cavaliers were named by Heinrich
As mid the buzz and glare they ranged,—
And as they passed among the benches
On all sides greetings were exchanged.
Just then the Duke Tannhäuser beckoned,
Now seeing him within his fold;—
Thenceforth the famous knight he reckoned
Within his walls as guest to hold.
Said he;—"Thy memory I've cherished,
It seemed had disappeared a star
From Wartburg, or perhaps had perished,
So long you kept yourself afar.
But since, Sir Knight, you now are with us,
I will keep you here as best I can,—
And wholly satisfy your wishes,
Content that you are back again."
Tannhäuser then was asked by Hermann
Anent the rivals' last campaign,—
And if the Roman Pope had favored
A general peace since Philip's reign.
The Landgrave said that he a long time
With Philip was at enmity,—

Until at length at Ichterhausen
Their feud was merged in amity.
When Erfürt's gardens suffered ravage
Despoiled was fair Thuringian Land,—
Bohemian bands of robbers savage
Destruction spread on every hand.
"Therefor it is I cannot hinder
That even in my own domain
A part of my beloved children
The rival Otto's side sustain."
Tannhäuser then assured the Landgrave,
Philip to him was well disposed,—
And that, since peace now ruled the empire,
The olden feud was wholly closed.
Hermann was pleased, and with much favor
His welcome guest he then dismissed,—
Who looking round him seemed to waver,
Nor where to turn his footsteps wist.
At length the Duchess toward he wended,—
Who, as was custom in that day,
Was by her waiting dames attended,—
But meantime, while upon his way,
Accosted him a well-born stripling
Who whispered; — "Sir, please speak me fair,—
Are you the Knight of Ofterdingen
For whom intelligence I bear?"
Then since the knight assented, said he,
"Without delay with me please come,—
Commissioned me a noble lady,
Who in her chamber waits alone."
Tannhäuser laughed; — "My child, thou errest,
No lady friend I know of here,—
Among the rest 't were well thou searchest,
Go seek some other cavalier!"

"But 't is the Knight of Ofterdingen,
Tannhäuser is his other name,—
To a noble lady I must bring him,"—
The insistent page spoke up again.
"But tell me, boy, who is the lady
That for me sends thus secretly?"
Replied the page;—"That is forbade me,—
Restrain your curiosity!"
Tannhäuser shook his head and wondered,
The boy he eyed with searching glance,—
"She doth mistake,—one to a hundred!
But I will chance it,— pray, advance!"

To an apartment of the castle,
Sequestered, somewhat far away,
The page conducted Tannenhäuser,—
Illuminated bright as day.
A handsome woman there was sitting,
Who rose and faced him silent, fair,—
Whom,—could he trust his puzzled vision,—
True he had seen,— where was it,— where?
No single step toward him she took there,
She offered neither seat nor hand,—
But like a living picture stood there,
As spell-bound by some wizard's wand.
While each the other was regarding,
In mute delay the seconds passed,—
The pause at length she broke, exclaiming,—
"Henry!" His blood ran hot and fast.
"Irmgard! Great God in space Elysian!
Is't thou, Irmgard?—Another sight!
A word, that not as airy vision
May fade away this image bright!

O blesséd day, and happy meeting!"
Eager, he pressed her to his breast
And kissed her, many times repeating,
While Irmgard's blush her joy confessed.
From his ardent embraces slipping,
Confused and dazed she stood alone,—
And smiling said; — "Henry have pity!
Thy sister now is fully grown."
"Not grown for me! — a perfect flower
Hast thou become,—thou gracious maid!"
At this she seemed slightly to cower,
As if some grief upon her preyed.
No note he took, but drew her with him
To a convenient sofa wide,—
And in a moment they were sitting
Closely together, side by side.
Then followed question after question,
Scarce time allowed to make reply
So much they queried, never resting,—
No end to it was to descry.
"What does Erwin? — and where his dwelling,
My quondam rough and tumble mate?"
"Erwin is Baron, long is wedded,
And at the castle lives in state,"
Said she, "but finish thy narration
And tell me of thy foreign life;
Thy fame was bruited through the Nation,
Victorious 'mid storm and strife.
All this betimes thou must unfold me
When offers chance and time enough,—
But now I am forced roundly to scold thee
For thy outrageous running off.
That you two bold but silly youngsters
At Dürrenstein were overthrown,—
Committing such transparent blunders,
Was simply your own fault alone;

Quite otherwise would all have happened,
If I had known your shallow scheme,—
To prayers you two I would have taken
And cured you of your foolish dream."
"Us ta'en to prayers? Ah! well we wist it,—
That if one word we said to thee,
With us to go had'st thou insisted ; —
We nothing told,— that could not be."
"But secretly to quit the castle,
To fly me as an uncaged bird,—
Not even one departing hand-shake,
And not one single parting word!"
"Did'st thou not find a dewy flower
Upon thy pillow, and my verse?
The rose I culled in that last hour
Before our flight for better or worse."
"Thou cam'st in person to my chamber?"
"Yes, when the early morning broke,—
That beauteous sight I well remember,
When final leave of thee I took.
Some time remained I, at thee peeping,—
Ah! Irmengard; thou wert so fair
There quiet lying, soundly sleeping,
The sunshine gilding face and hair!
The ruddy light streamed through the grating
And painted it a rosy red,—
Thy ivory cross illuminating,
As there it hung above thy bed.
As to a magic draught invited
Thy mouth, and as I doubtful stood,— "
"Oh, miscreant, hush!" she interjected,
Raising her hand in sportive mood.

But throwing then his arms around her,
Carressingly he touched her chin,—
Then in a soft embrace he bound her,
And drew her somewhat nearer him.
"Please tell me now, what has become of
My rose and verse? Dost recollect?"
With crimsoned cheeks then answered Irmgard,
"Henry,— thy gifts I careful kept."
Then suddenly again he kissed her,—
"O blessed angel! Joyful sight!
I sought a rival, and my sister
I find here,— precious, benedight."
Irmgard then quit her cushion, saying,—
"Too long we tarry from the rest;—
Come then, that mid the concourse straying
Our presence there may not be missed.
Go, friend! I'll follow quickly after,
Thou'lt find me at the Duchess' side,—
There we can further chat together,
Alone, to meet thee first I tried."
"God bless thee for it!" cried Tannhäuser,
And went, much prouder than before;—
As if the crown of King or Kaiser
Upon his haughty brow he wore.
Alone, both joy and sorrow feeling,
Irmgard a veil threw o'er her face
Down which the crystal tears were stealing,—
And deep reflecting for a space,
A heart-felt sigh at length escaped her,
Then 'gainst her breast her hand she pressed,—
While from her lips came in a whisper,
"Poor heart of mine, stand fast? 't is best!"
To the hall now returned Tannhäuser,
Which seemed much brighter than before,—

Where each among the grand assemblage
Won of his friendship more and more.
His smiling aspect plainly pictured
His buoyant heart, and meeting quick
Herr Walter von der Vogelweide
His hand he squeezed with vice-like grip.
"Ow, Ow!" cried Walter,—"hast thou always
An iron glove upon thy hand?
And whence thy eyes' unwonted radiance,
Henry, I cannot understand!"
"Storm! Storm!" exultant cried Tannhäuser,
"My boyhood's friend I've met tonight,—
A thousand flags are gaily waving,
Love beckons from its lofty height."
Sarcastic curled the lips of Walter,
Intently gazing Henry after;—
"Now for another passion vain
Beneath his ribs and in his brain!
Who can she be whom he has found here?
Some old-time friend? Storm! cried he, storm!
In spite of all his high endowment
Still gnaws in him the same old worm."
The early story knew not Walter
Of Irmengard, whom he espied,—
And who, 't was clear, before all others,
His friend bound closely to her side.
Their every look and word he noted,
Asked many questions,—it appeared
That she of Kürenberg was native,
And that her name was Irmengard.

Irmgard was saying;—"'Tis he, dear Sophie,
The cherished playmate of my youth,—
I always held him as my brother,—
Whatever pleased the one, in truth,

Was sure in turn to please the other,
Cousin Erwin made up the third;
Of riding, hunting, hawking, strolling,
As years rolled by, we never tired."
Tannhäuser spoke; — "But more audacious
Was Irmengard than either one,—
Our sports she ruled as umpire gracious,
And won our hearts her girlish fun."
The Duchess laughed; — "Well then continue
Your recollections at your ease,
And you, Sir Knight, I do invite you
Guest to remain, if it so please."
Profound obeisance made Tannhäuser,
Then Irmgard taking by her hand
Sought out a quiet little corner,
To escape the merry-making band.
Within an alcove, deep and spacious,
A pair of seats the couple found,—
Where free they were from spies audacious,
And yet were visible around.
Intently gazed they at each other,
On every word enamored hung,—
Each other's speech to drink in eager,
While both hearts mingled into one.
Walter the sitting pair there noting,
— As sudden seized with anxious care —
Angry exclaimed, the worst foreboding; —
"Yes,— storm it is which threatens there!
Playmates, forsooth! — Mere friendly greeting
Takes never on such ardent form,—
What flashes there, their thoughts repeating,
Is flaming passion's outburst warm."
Henry with hurried words now painted
To Irmengard his story all,—

From that day when from home he wended
Until returned to Wartburg Hall.
But quite a while he lingered over
The story of the Grand Crusade,—
Exhibiting in brightest color
The pomp and pageantry displayed; —
The voyage long mid billows surging,
Across the Ocean's stormy flood,—
Their disembarking, onward urging,
The army's stress, its poured out blood;
And specially the reckless daring
At the assault upon Byzance,—
And how himself, all perils sharing,
The walls had scaled with sword and lance; —
He also told of ventures dire,
In search of plunder and of spoil,—
The carnage dread 'mid blood and fire,
When trapped in that huge burning pile.
  The speaker's eyes were incandescent
With the emotion of his breast,
And Irmgard's cheeks meanwhile were crescent
With crimson blushes, self-confessed.
Of all the rest of his campaigning
Her dazéd ears heard but a part,—
In him she saw the hero reigning,
The worshiped idol of her heart.
  But when of the deciding struggle
In which King Philip's side he took,
And of the Waffenberger vict'ry
He then discoursed,— with eager look
She asked about each desperate fracas,
And who in every fray had won,—
How many knights with their retainers
Were wounded, or to death were done.

At length Tannhäuser finished, saying,
" To me it clearly doth appear,
Decreed it was by Fortune fateful,
Irmgard! that now I find thee here.
Thy questions I have answered fully,
Have told thee all, as true I ought,—
Fräulein von Kürenberg! now tell me,
What 't is, to Wartburg thee has brought?"
"Thus must thou never more address me,
For now another name I bear,— "
With crimsoned countenance confessed she.
Tannhäuser met her with a stare,
As if he naught had comprehended,
And must the announcement hear again
Which dreams of happiness had ended.
" Kurt Scharf'berg is my spouse's name,"
Low whispered Irmengard. Then jingled,
Nervously grasped, Tannhäuser's sword,—
While to his dazed and troubled vision
The floor seemed dancing ceilingward.
" And lives?" — His anger scarce disguising,
He instant hissed that one word out
In accents choking, and half rising,—
While sword and spurs betrayed his thought.
" Let go thy sword,— thou has contended
Already 'gainst him in mêlée,—
Nor have I had the slightest message
His fate anent for many a day.
The side he espoused of Emperor Otto ;—
If he with him to England fled,
If slain he were in mortal combat,
If now he is alive or dead,
I do not know; — At no time previous
Has he advice so long kept back."

"Lovest thou him?" inquired he dubious.
"I was not asked concerning that; —
The friend he was and fellow soldier
Of my protector, so he took
Me for wife; but as I grew older
Seldom he visited our nook.
To the domain of Landgrave Hermann
He is attached,— from here, point blank,
Is visible our little castle,
The Scharfenberg, on Erb-stream's bank."
"That castle in the valley's centre,
High perched on that green eminence?
Yes, I remember I rode near it,
When, quitting Ruhl, I cantered thence.
Through meadows verdant leads the pathway,—
Here I remain,— it is not far!
A happy heart my only armor,
And joyous hope my guiding star!"

At last the instruments were silent
And Duchess Sophie courteously,
Since 't was already long past midnight,
Dismissed the brilliant company.
And she herself and all her women,
The Landgrave and the attendance all
Of guests and knights and Hermann's henchmen
Then quitted the reception hall.
Tannhäuser who in many dances
With Irmgard trod the floor so bright,
Responding to her eager fancies,
Had to her said a last goodnight.
To remain awhile urged the stay-overs,
But disinclined to try a bout
With old and seasoned all-night topers
He quickly passed the doors without.

Around a table now was gathered
A gallant crew from near and far,
And everyone who thirsty sat there
Was served by *Schenk von Vargula.
There nobles sat and poetasters,
And each possessed a yawning throat,—
Which never quailed nor feared disasters,
However tight the drinking bout.
All minstrels dearly love their Rhenish,
To serve them well all schenks are fain,—
For when the boys their cups replenish,
One's heart comes out,— runs in the wine.
O Wartburg cellars, deep and spacious!
O Landgrave's wine-casks, brimming o'er!
What could exhaust ye? Worms rapacious?
Knights' guzzling throats, or strollers' maw?
On this same night was no refraining,
The wine was passed on every side,—
But very few were as abstaining
As Eschenbach and Vogelweid.
The Carver Schlotheim cried, now mellow,
"Tell me if really our new guest
A milk-sop is and scurvy fellow,—
Who good wine hates, of vintage best?"
Walter replied,— his eyeballs twinkling,—
"Once on a time in the Tyrol
I saw him with a bishop drinking;—
His own he held and came off whole."
Cried Biterolf;—"A bishop! Truly
Who that can do, beyond all doubt
A well-soaked bungsman must be surely;—
All honor to Tannhäuser's throat!"
"But, anyhow, I careful watched him,
And know he must be deep in love,—

* Cellarer

I noticed how his eyes were flashing,
As from a forge sparks fly above,"
  Laughed out the Usher, Hermann Fahner;—
"If our old bully that had seen,
Sir Kurt von Scharfenberg, instanter
Between the pair cold steel would gleam."
  "How indiscreet your thoughts are springing!"
Cried Walter; — "Note it clearly, since
Dame Irmengard and Ofterdingen
Are almost like a pair of twins; —
By the elder Kürenberg were brought up
On his estate in Austria,
Quite like a maiden and her brother,
This cavalier and Irmengard."
  Sir Reinmar spoke; — "All ye who know him,
Be sure in love dispute or bout
'T will be no joke to overthrow him; —
At Vienne he fought such trifles out."
  "According to my honest judgment"
The Virtuous Author now began,—
"He is from crown of head to foot-print
A valiant, trusty, chivalrous man.
He has quite won my earnest liking,—
Just listen to his ringing voice,
Remark his eyes, so deep and striking,
Observe his springy princely poise!"
  The rest with him agreed precisely,
And praised Tannhäuser's bold career,—
Excepting Wolfram who was silent,
Then leaning, whispered Walter's ear; —
"His bravery deserves its guerdon,
His skill in minstrelsy flies high,—
His inexperience I can pardon,
He has my heartfelt sympathy; —

Miraculous in him are blended
Celestial fire and earthly dross,—
From soilure were it only fended,
His wondrous art were like a God's.
But in him burns a demon nature,
By passion torn and greed of fame,—
On life he looks as mere adventure
In sensual lustings' broad domain.
  But let him rave and stormy bluster,
A common fate will not be his,—
Ignobly fail, or shine with lustre
He will,— attaining to the skies.
For peaceful life he is too heady,
Unstable as a will-o-wisp,—
For dire contention I am ready,
To quarrel is his settled wish."
  "Unless you gents drink more and faster,"
Now cried the Schenk's sonorous bass,
I'll stop the vintage of my master; —
I tell you 't is a noble cask."
  Then all made busy glasses draining,
While fast and furious grew the fun—,
The wine was poured as if 't were raining,
Until announced,— "The cask is done."

  While of Tannhäuser they were talking,
The visitor with rapid gait
Adown the valley then was walking,
Scarce conscious what had willed stern Fate.
For thoughts were stirring in his bosom
And penetrating to his heart,
As twining tendrils climb and push in
A vineleaf shaded kemenat'.

And since his secret thoughts were running
On Irmgard's lovely form and bloom
And from him drove all sense of slumb'ring,
With them he sought the forest's gloom.
There welcomed him silence entrancing,
All nature rested as 't were dead,—
The straggling moonbeams glinted, dancing
Between the branches overhead.
How much, along the untrod byways,
He enjoyed his solitary walk!
And, step by step, how memory likewise
His half forgotten youth brought back!
The overhanging forest branches
Invitingly their arms stretched out,—
His mind was broadened and expanded,
Receptive of each passing thought.
What sparkling flashed, or dreamy floated
Seen by the moonbeams' silver light,—
What irridescent coruscated
'Mong dew-wet webs, or glittered bright,—
The droning insects in the valley,
The grasshoppers within the wood
And the weird moonlight seemed to tally
Exactly with Tannhäuser's mood.
The clouds in the blue heavens floating,
Tinged golden by the moonlight bright,—
The shadows on the craggy mountain,
The cliff-reflected amber light;—
For him all these had life and meaning
As quite alone he looked around,—
Since meditating and half dreaming,
His heart was listening every sound.
As formerly he felt it beating,
When Nature, his devoted friend,

Had first his youthful days, so fleeting,
Attracted to her secret trend; —
Then when, within his bosom youthful
And in his uncorrupted breast
She had impressed her lessons truthful,
While yet by world care unoppressed.
And in his memory recalling
Those youthful days so benedight,
His thoughts reverting to the Danube,
A gracious image rose in sight.
  A maiden 't was of fifteen only,
Of slim but strong and agile build,—
With lovely tresses auburn-blonden,
And deep blue eyes, full-orbed, self-willed.
Her rounded cheeks were soft as velvet,
And ruddy with their flower-like balm,—
Her pouting ruby lips presented
A wealth of lovely magic charm;
Most like a rosebud slowly blowing,
Its calyx doffing by degrees,—
Observed miraculously growing
'Mong moss and bushes 'neath the trees.
  Now this young girl, who shared his pleasure
And like his shadow to him clung,
And in all stress of wind and weather
With glowing cheeks beside him hung,—
This dare-devil who with him hunted,
Sustaining when his courage failed,—
To scold and stamp her feet was wonted,
Then with a hearty kiss compelled,—
Irmgard,—once more his life had entered,
As sunlight through the darkness streams,
And round her wreathing, close concentred,
Came back his earliest youthful dreams.

His mind recalled those youthful ways,
Forgotten long mid strife and stress,—
A thousand happy blissful days,
A never clouded happiness; —
Their little quarrels and entreatments
Where only birds were lookers on,—
Their little confidential secrets
'Neath shady foliage told, or spun.
Was Irmgard now inclined to laugh at
The sports they both pursued with zest?
And was she now disposed to carp at
What once they both esteeméd best?
A sister's greeting she extended,
Was now become a rose full blown,—
And yet her cheeks, where crimson blended,
Suffused with maiden shame had shown.
Although to woman she had ripened,
The gentle touch of Father Time
Had really Irmgard's sweetness heightened,
That greatest jewel of youthful prime.
But yet was then this recent greeting
And cropping out of mutual bent,
And their impassioned soulful meeting,
But sisterly affection's vent?
At first it gave him great enjoyment,
The events relating of his life,—
But why such bitter disappointment
On finding out that she was wife?
Suppose he grudged her to another,
Cherished had he the purpose e'er
Of making her his own forever,
And jealous watching over her?
Had he to Irmgard thus once spoken?
—Was bounden she by a single word?

With secrecy had he not broken
Away from Castle Kürenberg?
  A wife she was,—he must dissemble,—
Stern silence now was his devoir,
One thing however made him tremble,—
Her absent spouse she cared not for.
For Irmgard's sake that he lamented;
But if upon another's breast
He knew her happy and contented,
His jealous heart had known no rest.
Irmgard should never love another
Ev'n if his own she could not be,—
Although remain he must as brother,
Her heart, he knew, her heart was free.
  Nor had he any purpose reckless
Her tranquil virtuous life to rend,—
At all times he would veil his wishes,
And but approach her as a friend.
As sister he would love her always,
Alone he stood this earth upon,—
In all his wanderings and travels
No other heart his love had won.
  He wished again to ride beside her,
With her the livelong day to read,—
With her their youthful days to live o'er,
Her life make bright with ode and lied.
With her the woods he wished to traverse,
To feel the pressure of her hand,—
And when for him she twined a chaplet,
Gaze in her eyes, by zephyrs fanned.
Perhaps the angel would disclose him
The real feelings of her heart,—
And let him see, within it smould'ring,
Her self-denial and secret smart.

Half prone he mused on, meditative,
While ruddy through the dusky night
A lofty casement from of Wartburg
Was gleaming faint a single light.
Irmgard was it, awake, reflecting,
As himself in the valley there?
Of him was Irmgard earnest thinking?
Rising, he breathed a parting prayer; —
"Sleep well, dear sister, and in safety!
Though far from thee — I yet, am near; —
Divided, we are not estrangéd,
Thank God, again I have found thee here!"

V

CASTLE SCHARFENBERG

In her boudoir completely furnished
With gorgeous tapestries, where shone
Bright fittings and utensils burnished,
Sat Irmgard joyous and alone.
'T was here that she, almost a prisoner,
A lonely swallow in its nest,
Long years had passed in sorrow wistful,
In silence pining, ill at rest,—
And kept alive her secret longing,
Interminably hoping on,—
E'en though her heart's belovéd object
Forever from her side had flown.
But now her constant girlish wishing
Her childhood's friend to see again
Was realized,— in winter springtime,—
To herself confess she scarce was fain
The nature of her soul's emotion.
Three days agone, ere all befell,
Her pet canary had not told her
And yet he must have known it well,—

For now his little throat was piping
So merry in the sunny room; —
"Bring beer! bring beer!" as if a nipping
Consuming thirst had sudden come.
Ah! little bird! — Irmgard impatient
Wont thank you for the cooling draught
Your little beak cries for incessant,—
She burns, wounded by Cupid's shaft.
  Irmgard was sewing at her casement,
But no! thus busied she was not,—
She sat there in the distance gazing,
Considering her widowed lot.
The early summer zephyrs balmy
Were playing with her wavy hair,
And shading vines of climbing ivy
Kept out the sunshine's piercing glare.
'Fore her were spread green woods and meadow
And, Ah! the skies were heavenly blue,—
Not even a fleecy cloud or shadow
On the Hörsel appeared in view.
  Upon a table loose was lying
A much discolored written page,—
Also a rosebud — time defying —
Dried up, flat pressed, and brown with age.
The latter, only half expanded,
Once fresh and blooming to the sight,
Fragrant, with brilliant colors banded,
Was glittering with dewdrops bright
That morning when from slumber waking
The maiden found it by her side,
And Henry's farewell verses taking,
In vain to dry her tears she tried.

Have for thee a rosebud broken
Freshly from its tree,—
And to it in whispers spoken
Secrets meant for thee.

Deep in calyx quiet sleeping
Rests a modest word,—
Hundred crimson leaves are peeping
At the precious hoard.

As myself this morning early,
Press it to thy lip;—
Thou may'st drink the dewdrops pearly,
And its fragrance sip.

Leaving for thee heartfelt greeting,
Thee I quit with pain,—
Roses wither, hope is fleeting,
Hope to meet again!

As now the housekeeper, Beata,
The chamber entered, Irmgard threw
Some folds of silk stuffs on the table,
The keepsakes to conceal from view.
"I saw them", said Beata, teazing,—
"In spite of all your secrecy."
Her mistress' countenance flushed deeply
A purple crimson, mounting high.
Beata was the child of Hawart,
The Marshal at the Kürenberg,—
Her better half had been attached to
And served the Ritter Scharfenberg.
A trifle older than was Irmgard,
With her Beata quitted home,—

Together with her husband wedded,
Who at Erfürt to death was done.
  Joint mem'ries also leagued together
The pair of women in their nest,—
Who, like own sisters, found great pleasure
Exchanging secret thoughts confessed.
How often Henry Ofterdingen
They thought upon and chatted o'er,
When his renown in war and singing
From house to house some stroller bore!
  Long since had read Beata plainly
In Irmgard's heart what sort of love
Was really beating there for Henry,
What dreams around him still she wove.
So when next day, the fest-day after,
From Wartburg Castle home returned,
She had related to Beata
Whom she had met, what she had learned,—
The last thin crust then fell in pieces
Which o'er her secret long had lain,
And Irmgard's hidden love revealed was
As down her cheeks fell tears like rain.

  Three days and nights were now elapséd
Since she had met her old-time chum,
And 'mid her hopes she yet was anxious;
Was't sure to see her he would come?
She scarcely wished it; — Ah! impetuous,
She feared her own heart's heavy load,—
And yet she gazed and gazed continuous
Adown the sun-lit valley road.
In place of meeting Ofterdingen,
Were it not base her friend to fly?
But how could she his suit deny him,
If Henry loved her equally?

A single glance, to him betraying
The secret of her troubled heart,
The seeds might plant of a dread harvest
And whole sheaves reap of sin and smart.
This thought by her was not outspoken
But held possession of her mind,
As summer thunder showers broken
One's house invade, before, behind.
But if 't were only common friendship,
Not love, which he for her had shown,—
If in her friend, the Tannen-hussar,
But throbbed a brother's heart alone,—
Why then — in silence she would hide it
And fortitude, such as alone
Women possess, themselves denying,
And thenceforth secret keep her own.
These haunting thoughts she fain had banished,
But failed to adopt a settled plan,—
And since misgiving had not vanished
In low tones to herself she sang.
Sometimes her song was hopeful wholly,
As if care she had cast aside,—
Sometimes it breathed of melancholy,
A swan song lorn, of love and pride.
She,— bred at Kürnberg, and no singer?
The art Sir Conrad her had taught,—
Two harps hung in her chamber inner
Which from Erwin's with her she brought.

Now entering, cunning Beata
Sat down and swift her needle plied,—
While in the darkened kemenate
Deep silence reigned on either side.

No sound was heard except the rustling
Of silken stuffs which hung in folds,
And crackled as the women bustling
Were busy with their sewing tools.
  The truant thoughts of both the women
Were traveling the selfsame road,—
Of it they each were fully conscious,
But both to speak out first were loath.
Each one most willingly had spoken,
And each to listen was disposed
To what, when silence once is broken,
A loving heart bewitches most.
Should either that name only mention
Which made them thus play Hide and seek,
And occupied their sole attention,
'T would ring like Resurrection's shriek.
  Out doors the merry birds while singing,
Or chirping 'mong the hedges cool,
Called,— "Ofterdingen! Ofterdingen!"
As if each bush and shrub were full
Of his ambassadors; — the jaybirds
Cried "Henry! Henry!" and each thrush,
The house approaching, plainly warbled
"Tannhäuser comes! unbar! pull, push!"
His name was chirped by birds and insects,
As if with it were filled the air,—
But Irmgard broody was and silent,
And stern repressed her thoughts with care.
  Beata quite a long time suffered
The silence which imprisoned thought,
Until to break the ice she ventured
And courage mustered to speak out.
With ears well sharpened for the answer,
She queried slyly and composed,—

"Is not the lot of two lone widows,
Like you and me, a life half lost?"
Widows like you and me? The question
Pricked Irmengard as 't were a thorn; —
Added Beata,— "my position
For full three wretched years I've borne,—
And you yourself most be convinced of
What truthful cannot be gainsaid,
Entirely free is your existence
Since Scharfenberg is long since dead."
"'T is God alone controls the issue,"
Said Irmengard,— "of feud and strife"; —
"Yes," said Beata,— "but I argue,
If one considers Sir Kurt's life,—
That never was his courage broken,
He must be dead and buried too; —
I advise that you have masses spoken
His soul to save,— many or few."
"But thou advisest prayers funereal
For one who yet may be alive,—
Not yet I am clothed in black apparel
Which thou would'st prematurely weave."
"I am sure the Knight with God is resting,
Never so long was Sir Kurt gone,—
Nor in his absence ever left us
Without intelligence so long.
Do you intend more years to await him?
If so, gray-haired you soon will be,—
Fy! pretty rosebud in life's garden,
Bloom out and shine, for thou art free!"
"Beata! cease thy tiresome pleading!
'T is true my spouse's trade is war,—
But come he might this very evening,
Dismount, and in the flesh appear.

But listen! Hear'st the warder call out?
A welcome note sounds forth his horn,—
A guest is coming at a gallop,
A cavalier it is, highborn.'
"A guest indeed! And the most welcome
Of all who could thy presence seek!
Thou turnest pale,— I see thou'rt trembling;
Which one foretells thy bosom's beat?
Irmgard! whoever 't is arriving,
He can be only one of two,—
With open arms you must receive him,
I'll go and quickly bring him you."
Beata went,— the heart unstable
Of Irmengard was beating sore,
And she to advance was quite unable,—
But, like a statue, on the door
Her gaze she fixed;— which of the two men
Would in her presence soon appear?
Decide it would the coming moment,
But such a buzzing filled her ear
She scarce could hear his footsteps hasty
Though screened him but a wall of wood,—
Until upon her chamber's threshold
Henry von Ofterdingen stood.

Irmgard was standing at the casement,
Her face averted from the light,—
And in the dimly lighted chamber
Could not observe the caller knight
How quickly crimson red stole over
Her white and marbly countenance,
Nor how in place of ashen color
Shot forth a sudden joyous glance.

But when to meet the knight she wended
Awhile she stood irresolute,—
Then to him shy her hand extended,
While trembling were both hand and foot.
And he, cool in anticipation,
Now that at length he saw her near,
Could only vent the exclamation;—
"Irmgard! thou seëst I am here!"
She first shook off dazement bewild'ring,
For Henry's presence gave her strength;—
"Are we, as once, two foolish children?"
She smilingly spoke up at length,—
"Or has our lengthy separation,
With ne'er a greeting word from you,
Brought to us both but tribulation,—
Now that as friends we meet anew?"
To her the knight responded, smiling,
"Quite right thou art,— 'T is so with me,—
'T is thou, my courage must enliven,
All other women found me free."
"Yes, that thou wast, when we together
To romp were wont 'neath leafy bough,—
Naught caring for or wind or weather
As gay we roamed the forest through.
Dost recollect our childish bravery
When chanced Erwin not to be there,
How through the brook thou didst me carry,
And braidedst up my loosened hair?"
"And how the crags among we climbéd,
And arbors built us out of moss.—
And thou wert wont to sit beside me,
And wreaths of flowers to me toss?"
"And how, whenever we went riding,
My horse thou holp'dst me off and on,—

A pastime I found much delight in,
And oft dismounted just for fun."
"Irmgard, to me it was a pleasure,
And though no strength had I to waste
I lifted thee and wearied never,
Because thyself 't was I embraced."
"And dost thou think I was oblivious?
Why! — even the Sorrel knew it well
And lent our strength assistance, chivalrous,
By patient standing stone stock still."
"Think'st thou thy horse would now abide it?
Of course I am out of practice now,—
But yet I think we ought to try it,
Whether thy weight will me allow."
Nodding, she roguish eyed him steady,
While tinged her cheeks a trifling blush, —
Then came Beata; — "I have ready
For both a luncheon light and lush," —
Said she respectfully and lively,
And ere returning to her place
Regarded them inquisitively,—
But Irmgard turned away her face.

As guest and hostess they were sitting,
And chatting at their noon repast; —
Said Irmengard; — "If thou art willing,
Do tell me now the truth at last,—
Where have thy moments passed the happiest?"
Tannhäuser eyed her steadfastly; —
"To read that in my heart thou mayest —
The happiest was I when near thee,
At Kürenberg, in early lifetime;" —
She interrupted; — "No, afield
I mean, while thou wast bravely fighting,
And journeying wide with horse and shield."

"Thou sayest it,— when ardent battling
My shield behind, happiest was I,—
'Mid shock of fight and lances crashing,
In Holy Land and Hungary.
By stress of Fortune driven wherever,
Good luck I had on every side,—
But truly happy was I never,
Though in my art I took much pride.
But sometimes, when alone and moody,
To sing my verses brought me rest,—
At other times impulsive, broody,
Composing lyrics soothed my breast.
Excepting that,— in every station
But once I've found delight intense,—
Bewitched by heart intoxication
The Love Court at in Avellentz,—
When I the golden wings of freedom
At Adamunt to the air had spread,—
And over hill and vale was speeding
In quest of Love, where e'er it led."
"In quest of Love?"— inquired unrestful
Irmgard, eager, disturbed in mind; —
"And was thy questing then successful,—
Thy heart's ideal didst thou find?"
"Irmgard,— 't was but a vague impression,
Naught knew I of Love's subtleties; —
'T was but a word,— until a woman
Instructed me what passion is."
He ceased,— her face she averted, anxious,
Then looked him in his face again,—
Her bosom rose and fell tumultuous,
Until anew the knight began.
"Irmgard, I'll answer all thy questing; —
By passion and my heart's unrest

Was I intoxicated, resting
Upon a lovely woman's breast.
Till then untaught, with all the vigor
Of ardent youth I grasped the prize
Of which Deliane was the giver,
To me a dream of Paradise.
  And later still, when I was older,
Ere Venice from I sailed away,—
Again I tasted, then grown bolder,
Ardent desire's imperious sway.
As hot as southern Phoebus fiery
Richezza's kiss my cravings fed,—
Indulging passion to satiety,
But soul to soul was never wed.
Abiding love since then I've searched for
From many a lovely woman's breast,—
Intent to probe the secret fervor
In her entrancing form confessed.
  I questioned many women vainly,
As for a strange land I had steered,—
Of all not one could tell me plainly
What 't was which passion thus endeared.
With all my earnest anxious striving,
As yet I have not found Love's soul,—
True love I still am constant seeking,
From first to last my steadfast goal.
The deepest, most mysterious tenses
Of woman's heart I wish to know,—
In heat of joy and wavering senses
To comprehend her passion's glow.
  The greatest of all earthly pleasures
Can only woman man vouchsafe,—
I count it first among all treasures,
For all or nothing 't is, I crave.

Forgive my speaking thus explicit,
My heart's desire ask not to know !
For a sister's ears 't is quite illicit,—
Farewell! I will come some days from now."
  Forth rushed the knight,— at end his visit,—
Irmgard gazed after earnestly ;—
" For a sister's ears 't is quite illicit, "
He does not, does not, love poor me."

  Abrupt he quitted Schloss and Pleasance,
Behind his back the gate had clanged,—
And yet she seemed to feel his presence
As if his spirit yet remained.
She looked to see if he was absent,
Or if he possibly delayed,—
Although his body was not present
His ghost invisible yet staid.
  Still sounded in the hallway spacious
His trenchant voice's echoing roll,—
Which with its tones bell-like and gracious
Had penetrated to her soul.
His piercing eyeballs still were flashing
As when of passion's joys he told,
And to her seemed his utterance dashing
Like springtime tempests in the wold.
  His inner nature, passion driven,
Was manifest to Irmgard's love,—
As when the vaporous smoke is riven
A red volcano's mouth above.
With dread she saw the embers smould'ring,
Carefully hid and burning low,
Now blazing up, herself enfolding,
And scorching her with fiery glow.
  Woe ! if her own heart he detected,
As she his heart had clearly read, —

And saw her passion, hope-erected
Above a chasm yawning dread.
Irmgard was woman and created
With boundless cravings in her heart; —
" For a sister's ears 't were quite mismated —
Ah ! Sister-love ! how cold thou art! "

The dusky hours of night were banished
By break of day and morning's red,—
Her great anxiety had vanished
And her solicitude had fled.
At first disposed to grieve and ponder
On what from Henry's lips had broke,—
She now, refreshed by tardy slumber,
To new-born hopefulness awoke.
What yesterday in his confession
So harshly grated on her ear,
Almost defiant in complexion,
Today she excused with judgment free-er.
The hours increased her admiration,
And this conclusion she had reached,—
That not by any common station
His worth must be weighed or impeached.
In all the magic of his presence
To her he so heroic seemed,—
No longer guilty of malfeasance
Her old companion now she deemed.
In all his person's force and prestige
Which on this planet no bounds saw,
Among his fellows, proud and restive,
Supreme he strode, himself his law ;
His chosen aims he traveled towards,
Accepting the advice of none,—

And all fish-blooded sleepy cowards
Despising, kicked from him like stone.
  A man like this might well lay claim to
The great rewards of high emprise,—
Vouchsafe to such kind Fate is fain to
What to the million it denies.
His fiery untamed heart was weighted
With thoughts of love and fame and wars,—
No one like him or loved or hated
Beneath the canopy of stars.
  Thus reasoned she with predilection,
That she her friend no more esteemed
Than his renown and her affection
To warrant her in doing seemed.
She plainly saw the situation,
The great temptation to betray,—
But thought not in her wifely station
To waver or to go astray.
  But was there danger? He addressed her
As sister of his own free will,
And he could only for a sister
A brother's kindly interest feel.
Thus in her sistership believing,
With high resolve her courage rose; —
"O Heart, be silent! Tongue, deceive him,
And Eyes, my secret ne'er disclose!"
  "But yet came not my friend predestined
My loneliness to drive away,—
And once more meet together festive,
United after long delay?
Is it not Fortune's doing rather,
Or God's behest long years ago,—
For better or worse to cling together,
And equal share both weal and woe?"

Yes, all her sorrow and misgiving
She wished to banish far away,
And though unloved by Ofterdingen
With him to laugh and joke and play,—
As when at Kürenberger Castle
They careless were and light of heart,—
With anxious fears had not to wrestle,
And nothing knew of love or smart.
But yesterday, old times recalling
With him in confidential chat,
Each little secret or outfalling
Together they had well laughed at.
At last she ended by esteeming
As harmless this her new found joy,—
And what at first seemed dire and threatening
Was sheer good luck without alloy.

The summer many flowers was bringing,
And days had passed since his farewell,—
Irmgard was at the window sitting,
Gazing afar o'er wood and dell.
Henry's arrival she was hoping,
And if his word were in default
With patience to await his coming
Was her intent and only thought.
But when the warder from the tower
Three times had called the morning's break,—
Her hopeful spirit 'gan to lower,
And need she had of all her faith.
Next day 't was vanished altogether,—
In place of cheerful waiting on him,
As comes a cloud in changing weather
There came an eager secret longing

Which, gaining strength, of peace bereft her ;—
The embers soon in flames burst out,
And neither rest nor quiet left her
As steadily she gazed without.
Such waiting and such tiresome longing,
When endless, as if time flew back,
Makes grow to hours the minutes thronging,—
True love requiting with the rack.
  Where was he now? What kept him absent
In Eisenach, from her so far?
Was it the minstrels and the Landgrave?
Attracted him some new risen star?
At Court were many handsome women,
And when a knight came seeking love
'T was natural that many of them
Their best would try his heart to move.
But no! she spurned the bare suggestion
And angry was from head to toe,—
If he should come she would him question,
If not, in search of him would go.
  Her mistress' mood Beata noted
And understood all well enough,—
But held her peace, to her devoted,
While curled a smile around her mouth,—
Since Irmengard, who never prior
Coquettishness or pride had shown,
Was now arrayed in rich attire
As was her wont in days agone.
  Irmgard was in her kemenate
That afternoon when, rataplan,
Showing her head, announced Beata,—
"He's coming now!" then off she ran,
Busied with household needs belated,—
While Irmengard in haste upsprung,

And ill at ease some moments waited,
Thoughts to collect and curb her tongue.
  He found a kind and warm reception,
Met neither blame nor chiding sore,—
No word betrayed her heart's affection
Nor how the hours she counted o'er.
When to Irmgard he had related
His pleasant life at Wartburg Hall,
Where every day new pleasures waited,
The harps he took down from the wall.
  "Irmgard! — to sing hast thou forgotten?
A nice duet would pleasant be; —
Intoned together, changed in nothing,
As often practised formerly,
When thy grandfather taught us singing,
And Sumidus, the brave old priest,
Joined in and with his bow and fiddle
Cheered up the evening song and feast."
  "Oh yes! Some lovely composition
So liked by our playmate Erwin,—
In vain his efforts and volition,
Because duets he could not sing.
No, Henry! I have not forgotten
Those olden songs so dear to me,—
Since then I've sung them very often,
Commence! commence! I'll hold with thee."
  "Here is a song of my composing,
To thee its measure is well known,—
Two lines must each one sing in solo,
The following four in unison."
  Now hark! Their grandsir's harps uplifted
Harmonious rang in practised hands,—
As if each with a soul were gifted
Which suddenly escaped its bands

Exultantly,— each with the other
Quiv'ring in perfect time the strings,—
Each blending perfectly together,
Each to the other lending wings.
  Their voices too, melodious ringing
Alternately, then joining both,
Now singly rose, then mutual blending,—
While never echoed one false note.
To heights empyrean they bounded,
Its proper pitch preserved each voice,—
Like plaint of hearts the music sounded,
While, answering, each spoke its choice.
  Tannhäuser's voice, a trenchant tenor,
And Irmengard's contralto low
Serene and deep as moonlit river,—
His pure as sunlight's golden glow,—
These harmonized and fused together
And like a single jewel shone,—
As lightnings meet in thundrous weather,
As 't were two souls conjoined in one.
  The music built them toll-free bridges
O'er which each heart to heart passed in,—
Their eyes were radiant with pledges
And plainly mirrored — "mine and thine!"
It seemed as if was hovering round them
The spirit of their old-time home,—
Which, now invoked, together bound them,
And stretching out its hands was come.

O'er hill and vale would I could fly at dawning,
With my consuming love alone to be.

And if thou took'st the crimson wings of morning,
My longing heart would bring thee back to me,

The winds are blowing,— the rustling tree-tops
glisten,
Their song the birds are caroling again,
To which all human hearts must ever listen,—
"There is no love without consuming pain."

Would I could sail away the Ocean over,
Where sound of mortal voice I ne'er should hear!

And even if so far were fled my lover,
My constant trust and hope would find thee
there·

The skies are blue, and twinkling all the planets,
Along the placid tide no surges leap,—
My dearest wish 't were in its depths to vanish,
Where one 'mid pleasant dreams is rocked to
sleep.

At length to break my silence I am willing,
To thee my ardent longing I'll confess.

And as in springtime buds with sap are filling,
Our love shall spring, as they, miraculous.

The birds are singing, the woods are thick with
flowers,
The foaming brooklet in the sunshine gleams,—
In fond embraces pass the happy hours,
And joyous earth alive with pleasure seems.

Thine eyes to me are like two goblets golden,
Brimming with hope and secret love confessed,—
To-day or night how should I be beholden,
Unless to rest against thy heaving breast?

As soon as Henry had departed,
Taking the harp to which he sang
Irmgard her fingers quickly darted
The strings across with sudden clang; —
"Ye harp-strings, tell me what lay hidden
In your and Henry's magic tones!
What from his eyes flashed forth unbidden,
With potency to move e'en stones?
Was't Love? the chords are still a-trembling!
Not Love? O harp, a single thought!
That as when thunder loud is rumbling
A flash may guide me safe to port!"
But as the harp continued silent
And unresponsive all was hushed,—
Her lips she rested for a moment
The chords against by Henry touched.

The second day returned Tannhäuser,
Wished for, but not expect so soon,—
Adown the vale they strolled together
And 'neath the oaks they walked at noon.
Beneath the cool and shading branches
Of the o'er-arching forest trees,
Where easy 't were to lose the pathway,
Inviting 't was, and stilled the breeze.
As mid a throng of people passing
Distinguished walks a royal pair,
And filled with awe the masses gazing
In silence stand back everywhere,—
So all the tenants of the forest,
The stalks and stems, the tree-tops wide
With green beflect and colors rarest,
Smooth stemmed and moss-barked, kept aside.

The branches bent as they walked by them,
Inquiringly, to see them near,—
The flowers straightened up to spy them
And every grass-stalk lent its ear,—
As light of heart through wood and clearing
Passed gaily by the noble pair,—
Tannhäuser knight's apparel wearing,
Irmgard with loosely waving hair,—
On which was set, her head to cover,
A wreath of twigs from sapling oaks,
While she, the gracious graceful rover,
Was clothed in gauzy summer robes.
Along they strolled ;—silence confusing
Pervaded forest-glade and lea,—
Whatever each one's secret musing,
They questioned not,—"Lovest thou me?"
Their thoughts were busy but unspoken,
Embarrassment was very near,—
As on they passed, by each was broken
A little flower here and there.
But each the other oft regarding,
Their stolen glances quick and keen
Were forward, backward, constant darting,
As sunbeams pierce the leaves between.
And when their glances brought reflection
Each blushed, confused and lost in thought,—
As caught in the act of heart abduction,
Each by the other mutual taught.
And if the hoard by the concealer
Half buried showed full many a trace,
'T was very sure the welcome stealer
Would leave a kingdom in its place.
O visible truth-telling silence!
O false and visionary dream!

Ye make the future seem as present,
Unreal make the present seem!
  Love wary is and acts with caution; —
Before the barriers are let down,
It seeks to hide all heart emotion
Awhile, and lets the skein spin on.
But Venus meanwhile, though invisible,
With them was walking hand in hand,—
And though she never breathed a syllable
She ruled them with her magic wand.
  Encrimsoned, Irmgard's cheeks were glowing,
So rapid beat her throbbing pulse,—
A thousand hopeful thoughts were flowing
Her mind within, spontaneous.
In their recurring silent pauses
A flippant word were out of place,—
Their dreaminess spoke more than voices,
Expectancy was in each face.
  Unconsciously afar they wandered
While slowly rambling in the wood,—
Then progress by a brook was hindered,
Shallow,—no stepping-stones there stood.
Halting upon its marge of clover,
Into her crimsoned face he gazed,—
They smiling understood each other,
Nor were by the occurrence dazed.
  If first and foremost Ofterdingen
Irmgard to catch up with all haste,—
If she were first, to him half springing,
While round his neck her arm she placed;
Which first or last, neither was conscious,
'T was carried out as quick as thought,—
Some little wood-warbler might tell us,
Which in the act the twain had caught.

With sinewy arms aloft he raised her,
While 'gainst her bosom leaned his head,—
Half nestling lovingly, half pressed there,
As 'twere a soft and grateful bed.
She closely clung to Ofterdingen
While to his brow her chin was pressed,—
The brook they quickly left behind them,
But on he kept nor thought to rest ; —
As if they neither knew nor wished to,
Long since he trod the solid ground,—
And that 't were time to discontinue
Their game of carrying around.
But when to end he brought their pastime
She clung to him as he to her,—
Between them was no first or last time
As lips met lips without demur.

'T wixt them no parting word was spoken
But hand in hand they lingered long,
Then leaving her no further token
Tannhäuser fled, and he was gone.
Her heart was full to overflowing
For now was answered all her quest,—
'Twas not Tannhäuser's verses glowing,
His silence 't was, the truth confessed.
The tears bedewed her eyelids blinking,
Henry still present seemed to be,—
Amid the clover joyous sinking
She murmured low; — "He does love thee!"

VI

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

Once more at the Castle Scharf'berg
Joyous sat in Irmgard's chamber
Those three persons who from Danube,
Their belovéd Austrian homestead,
Years agone had emigrated,—
While to Irmgard read Tannhäuser
Luarin, his lyric poem.
Irmgard had the reading quested,
And allowed, yes, she had wished it,
That Beata as a listener
At the reading should be present ;
For, her heart's desire repressing,
It was now her fixed intention
To avoid all private meetings
And to keep with her Beata
As a third one,— which contrivance
— By the hussy comprehended —
Was quite often by her thwarted ; —
For to advance her mistress' welfare
In her own way she was scheming,

Irmgard's happiness desiring.
Irmgard felt ashamed to tell her
Or to order her expressly,—
"Never leave me alone with Henry!"
So it happed the sly Beata
Would not understand her hintings,
But was always thinking over
How to foil her settled purpose,
And to leave them to each other.
So she sat now in their presence,
While Tannhäuser read with pleasure
From his poem, "The Rose Garden."
An accomplished reader was he;—
Spread before his eager listeners
Action and the chiefest actors
With such life in the description,
That enraptured with his diction
Each with strict attention listened.
From the hand of charmed Beata
Often dropped the thread and needle
When he read of frightful combats
In the enchanted Tyrol mountain.
On a sofa sat reclining
Irmgard listening,— keen regarding
The expression of the reader;
Wishing both with ear and eyesight,
Those twin gateways of the senses,
To completely comprehend all
Which in her belovéd's fancy
Long ago had germinated,
And now, by his lips recited,
With a double meed of merit
Of her senses took possession.
When with this last closing sentence

"This is where my story endeth,
God be with us ever and ever!"
To an end had come his reading,
All was still within the chamber;
For the verse had so impressed them,
Both the women captivated,
Neither cared to break the silence,—
And the reader first toward Irmgard
Smiling turned his questing vision.
  But before a word was spoken
By his lips, quite unexpected
Came the sound of fiddle playing
Close beside the chamber's threshold;
Brisk artistic master pieces,
Much surprising those who heard them.
Ei! the strains were so inspiring,
Masterful and so pretentious,
That they fain were glad to listen.
  From his armchair quickly springing
Cried the overjoyed Tannhäuser; —
  "If it's not the King in person
'T is his ghost which wanders, fiddling!"
Oped the door wide, and there stood the
Old and faithful graybeard stroller,
Pert and lively as a gamecock,
Steady fiddling, never stopping.
  "Come inside, thou ancient ice-bear,—
Thou art welcome!" cried Tannhäuser; —
To him rushed,— arms interlocking,—
While with long and measured paces
Old Spervogel crossed the threshold
Shaking with his deep bass laughter,—
Till his grizzled gray locks floating
Fairly danced around his temples.

At the Scharfenberger Castle
Old Spervogel, well belovéd,
Was by all three joyous welcomed,
And received with as much honor
As a guest of highborn station.
On the table quick before him
Of the best brew foamed a bumper,
Which he looked not at askantwise;
Then, as asked for, he related
Where he came from, what his object,
And his later day adventures.
"Yes, I made out tolerably," —
Said Spervogel,— now contented —
"All about the compass wandered,
Tramped and tramped with weary footsteps
Through the Holy Catholic Empire
Since upon the Rhine we parted;
After *quantum suf* of fiddling,
Tired of strolling, always fiddling,
Then a sudden longing seized me
And I chased you, bent to find out
Where on Earth you could be hiding.
'T was not easy here to trace you,—
Elsewhere I had thought to find you."
"That proves many often stumble
On unsought things,— not so, Irmgard?"
Cried Tannhäuser; — "Look here Jonas!
Know'st thou not this highborn lady
And this merry buxome widow?
Both are from the Kürenberge."
"Yes, I know them, all about them,"—
Said Spervogel,— "for I came here
Quite direct from Isenache,
Where with Master Hellegreffe

Your good landlord at the lindens,
I my quarters have selected ;
So we're once more housed together
Same as erstwhile in Vienna."
"Thou art welcome," — said Tannhäuser; —
"If I only had my saddle
For my pillow,— of it one side
Might perhaps be my own chattel,
But the other yours for certain ; —
With our heads pressed close together
We have that way often slumbered,
— I to southward, you to northward —
While upon your half the saddle
Like a bear you snored and snuffled."
Thereupon Spervogel's windpipe
With his thund'rous laughter echoed.
"I've not come quite empty handed,—
Bring you something interesting,
New and striking, in my satchel;
What? Yes, what! a master poem
Such as never yet was written;
All about an English noble
And the love he bare his mistress,—
Title "Tristan and Isolde";
Master Gottfried is its author,
A rich burgher's son at Strasburg,
Secretary of the Council."
"Let me see it! quite unheard of,—
Let me see it!" cried Tannhäuser.
"Yes! I've left it at my lodgings,
Them I mean,— replied Spervogel,—
Since two copies I have with me;
One I give you, and the other
Landgrave Herman sure will purchase,

And I hope for the good fortune
All my outlay to recover."
  Spoke Tannhäuser; — "Thou, a stroller,
Take to chaffering and to haggling?
If thou givest me one copy,
The other I will myself purchase
And present it to the Landgrave."
  "Well, for my part, I am willing,—
And I'll let you have it cheaper
Than Duke Hermann; — what it cost me
You may pay me,— not one sou more!"
Said Spervogel; — "and for yourself,
Scharf'berg's chatelaine most noble
Whom I've known from early childhood,
Also frolicsome Beata,
Daughter of old Father Hawart,
Thanks accept for this refreshment!"
  Irmgard laughed out,— "how would suit you
Yet another little droplet?"
  "Well! I am not pledged against it;—
On the highway 'tis quite dusty
When it's fly time; in my judgment
To repeat the dose won't hurt this
Father's sister's brother's sonny."
  "No, of course not!" — cried Beata,
"Come and draw your beer in person!"
Then she nudged him with her elbow,
At the stroller slyly winking.
"All right,— all right! Comprehended;
Bring it! I am comfortable!"
  "Wouldn't you like to draw your own beer
From the barrel in the cellar?"
  "What's the good of that, Beata?
Keep your feet away from mine, please!"

"You must come and see the cellar,"—
Said Beata, winking at him,
Thumping him again with elbow.
"Hum, just so! Hum! Naturally!"
"Come along then,—naturally!
Fresh from barrel, nothing better!
Are n't you up to snuff?"—At that he
Half suspected, and he squinted
At the cavalier and lady,—
Who, immersed in conversation,
Nothing of their byplay noticed
Or perhaps cared not to check it;—
Both then quitted the apartment.
Scarcely was the door behind them
When Spervogel stopped and pointed
In his comic mincing manner,
And with only one eye open,
With his thumb behind his shoulder;—
"Hum hum? Hm m! Hm m! Also, finally!
You old bear's scull!"—said Beata,—
With her hand her forehead tapping.
"Now he has another woman!"
Said the stroller;—"Well, what of it?
Widow is she, rich and pretty,—
Even if she does not know it
It is true, and she too youthful
To forswear the tender passion
Like a nun,—so help me join them!"
"When of women 't was the question,
My assistance never counted
In such matters,"—said Spervogel,—
"But I'll think the casus over,
And will brew a little philtre

Which described I saw and noted."
Then they disappeared down cellar.
  So the pair of almost lovers
Were at last alone together.
One requesting word from Irmgard
Would have kept the thirsty stroller
Stationary in the chamber,
And Beata's cunning thwarted: —
But Beata's roguish nature
—In her always dominating —
That day was by Irmgard humored
That she might not seem too anxious
Nor reveal the slightest weakness
To Tannhäuser, which might later
Make him bold to use the knowledge,—
Forcing her his suit to frown on.
  Was he conscious that she loved him?
Had that kiss within the forest
Not betrayed her; —she too lending,
As she well knew, her full half of
That exchange of mutual rapture?
Ah! it was on both sides ardent,—
Yet, of it she most repented.
For by passion overpowered,
In her dear friend's arms so cradled,
To his neck and shoulders clinging,
Finding out he really loved her,—
She herself that tender pledge of
Full blown and imperious passion
Ardent had received and given.
  Since that day her friend Tannhäuser
Seemed composed and very tranquil,—
But she noticed that he eyed her
With a look of eager passion

And it seemed as if his glances
All her nature dominated.
Knew he not he was belovéd!
Surely it was quite unlikely
He who sought so passionately
Female hearts to meet and conquer
— Knowing also how to probe them —
Was not also her heart testing
Or perhaps would later test it,—
Might be by his observation,
Might be with the open question;
"Irmgard! — dost thou love me?"—'Twas this
Threatened question which she dreaded,—
This same query and her answer
Which she then must be prepared with
On the instant; — then, what after?
  Ah! mixed up with all her trouble
Was a strong unconquerable
Hope of final blissful issue.
Nothing on the Earth's broad surface,
No announcement of good fortune
Could she hear with greater pleasure
Than love's undisguised confession
By the lips of Henry spoken.
Nothing else could make her happier
Than her love for him to whisper.
But her heart was very anxious,
Such confession contemplating.
  She compared it to an arrow
Shot forth by an archer, blindfold,
But to check its flight unable,—
Landing in the misty distance,
Mark and purpose overshooting.
At full tension was the bowstring,—

But her archer's arm was trembling,
Since her heart was torn and anxious.
  Yesterday she most resolved to
Fly far off and in some cloister
Hide away from her belovéd,—
Thus to escape her own heart's weakness,
Penance doing, him renouncing;—
Now in heat of regnant passion,
With unmeasured soft embraces
She inclined to meet Tannhäuser,—
Never, nevermore to quit him.
  But as from impending danger
And unwelcome blows of fortune
Anxious hearts draw back, recoiling,
To the last, so 'tis, when hopeful,
They anticipate with trembling
Even that entrancing moment
Which at once and final brings them
To the height of rare good fortune.
  Thus 'was Irmgard's resolution
To put off the explanation
Which her peace of mind was threatening
When alone with Ofterdingen,—
Since one moment's risky silence
Might bring on a conversation
On that all ingrossing subject
Which was in her bosom billowing.
  Therefore when the two companions
Rose and from their presence vanished,
Shrewdly she held fast the thread of
Their discussion to the poetry
Which Tannhäuser had recited,—
Praised it with such hearty unction,
Asked so many different questions

To its characters relating,
That, confined to one sole channel,
Conversation never halted
Till Tannhäuser ended all by
Calling back the absent stroller,—
With him to return to Eis'nach.
Very anxious was Tannhäuser
To peruse the poem of Gottfried
Brought for him by old Spervogel,
And by him extolled so highly.

As Spervogel and Tannhäuser
Who his horse was homeward leading
Through the valley walked together,
Asked the stroller;—"Dost remember
That day we were met together
Near the Adamunter Convent?
You in long dark-colored capote,
To become a monk expecting!
How yourself I earnest counseled
To abjure your popish fancy
And take up a knight's profession?
Hast forgotten? Did I err in
Pointing out the joy of freedom?"
"No! quite right, my old companion!"
Said Tannhäuser,—"and forever
Shall I thank you for it;— sure 'tis
That I never could have staid there;—
Some day, were it soon or later,
To you I should have absconded,—
Even if my head were shaven."
"And do you remember also
Telling me your mother's vision
As we walked along the wayside?

Yonder dwells she in that mountain,—
She whom, as yet quite untutored,
You mistook for Virgin Mary.
In that mountain dwelleth Venus;—
If some day for merry pastime
Fancy prompts you her to visit,
The ancient aunt of our good landlord
Knows just how the hill to enter
And to come back,—but returning
Is a long and weary process.
  Namely; some unspotted virgin,
By the full moon's light unclouded,
Must in silence plant an acorn.
When that acorn to a tree grows,
And its trunk is big and solid
And a cradle can be fashioned
From a single section of it,—
Then the hero will on Earth come
And will in his cradle slumber
Who, when grown to perfect manhood,
From the mountain can release you."
  "Is there one thing you're not up to?"
Laughed out cheerily Tannhäuser;—
"In a moment you know always
What all others take a day for,—
But I'm not in special need of
Any beldame's croaking wisdom.
Yet for you I have an errand,—
Am not pressed,—nor in a hurry;
For some days yet rest at leisure."

  At the inn the stroller gave to
The impatient Ofterdingen
Both the copies of the poem;—

Scarce ungirded and unweaponed
Quickly sat down Ofterdingen,
To peruse it very anxious.
  That night closed not sleep his eyelids;
As he read on far and further,
Ever grew his admiration
And his wonder at the charming
Incomparable creation,
With such master skill constructed.
Gottfried's high strung poem of passion
Filled with lore of human frailty
In his own soul found an echo
His serenity disturbing,
In him shame and envy waking.
A most brilliant master poem
By a great contemporary
Once again he had before him,—
Which, like Wolfram's Parcifal,
His own idling roundly chided.
But how different the action!
  Worldly manners, life's deep current
Gottfried's courtly verses told of,
As did also Wolfram's Grail King.
Mighty Wolfram, mystic, subtle;—
Who with earnest powerful diction
Struggling hero impulse pictured
Skepticism's force defying,
With contrition meditating,—
Always at salvation aiming,
Nobly grasping and contending
That the aim of life was only
Found in the mysterious secret
Of God's love and Christus' worship;
What a contrast, Wolfram — Gottfried!

Here in all its strength and beauty
Two hearts' passionate affection,—
Love's constraint and love's enjoyment,
Guilty love and guilty passions,—
Which, by magic draughts awakened,
Human rules and God's ordainings
Set at naught and violated.
As a whole the poem of Gottfried
Like was to a golden river;—
The minutest things were painted
With a mighty master's pencil,—
And the pleasures of the senses,
Ardent longing uncontrollable,
Daring actions, cunning ruses
And audacious crafty ventures
Plainly told;—on which however
His superb poetic talent
And his elegance of diction
In their most seductive beauty
He had copiously expended.
Wolfram's intellect transcendent
Full of wonder struck Tannhäuser,—
But this poem of Master Gottfried
Touched his heart strings' deep emotions;—
From their hiding places conjured
All the old-time headstrong ardors
Of his own heart's earnest longings;—
Tristan's self incarnate was he.
And Isolde? Ah! he needed
Not to look far for his blondine;—
In the person of Beata
Brangwain also was quite handy,—

Not so handsome but devoted
And as crafty as Brangâne;
Quite superfluous was the philtre.
  To peruse the enchanting verses
Also would delight much Irmgard,—
So one copy to her sent he
On the next day by Spervogel;—
Nicely written by his own hand,
On the wrapper he indited
—Meaning thus to attract attention—
  "To Irmgard,—from her Tannhäuser,
Loves of Tristan and Isolde."
And with pigments bright he colored
After Sumidus' instructions
T. and I.—their own initials,
Since they nicely corresponded.

  From the hands of Ofterdingen
The other copy of the epic
Landgrave Hermann glad accepted;—
Heard with undisguiséd wonder
The unstinted admiration
It accorded by the hero.
  That his guests might hear it quickly
And one reading prove sufficient,
He arranged to have the verses
Read to all hands in his presence;—
So the minstrels of his household
And the barons were collected
Round the Landgrave,—while successive
Each one read,—and when 'twas finished
On the third day,—for but few hours
Daily lasted recitation—
All were quite enthusiastic,

On its beauty all agreeing
And the finish of the poem.
In their general approval
Landgrave Hermann joined the others,—
Then he carried off the volume
To his wife the Duchess Sophie,
That she also might enjoy it.
  Then arose among the minstrels
Ofterdingen, swift proposing
All should join him in inviting
Gottfried, Strasburg's famous poet,
As their guest to visit Wartburg,
That they might his person look on,
And inform him how much pleasure
His great epic them had given,
And receive him with great honor.
  Cordially to his proposal
All agreed, but Walter wistful
Eying Wolfram as he sat there
Moody, scowling, sternly silent,
Ruminating,— cautious asked him; —
"Wolfram! Dost thou understand well,
Gottfried is to come to Wartburg?"
  "No! By helm and shield!" cried Wolfram
Quick arising,— "I forbid it!
If you invite him I myself will
Quit this country,— for I will not
Stay and meet him, who in verses
Has my own self gross insulted."
  "Thee insulted?"— questioned Reinmar,—
"Where and how then?— In the poem
Thy name was not even mentioned."
  Growled out Wolfram; — "Didn't you notice
Those particular expressions

Coined expressly to provoke me?
When he lugs in —"jumping rabbits — "
" Silly faith "—" poetic tricster "—
Also—" visionary fancies "—
"Meagre shade of leafless tree-trunk"—
'Tis at me he spits his venom.
  But how know you Gottfried's meaning? "
Asked the Moral Author, Heinrich.
  " Since in Parcifal's first canto
I make mention of a rabbit
Which escapes a traveler's notice,—
As the moral of my poem
'Scapes such dull and brainless ninnies
As this Gottfried there in Strasburg."
  Biterolf then interjected; —
" Friends,—'tis clear — we can't deny it,—
In those quite injurious phrases
Wolfram is the person aimed at; —
Better let them both together
Their own mutual quarrel fight out
'Twixt the barriers, knightly fashion."
  Wolfram, adverse; —" He is low-born,
Not of high degree and station; —
Shall a high-descended minstrel
Fight with any first-come stranger ? "
  "I see yet another way out,"—
Walter cried.— "You will forgive him
When you meet him personally, —
For this Gottfried — now in question —
Is a poet naturally
By the grace of God, — as we are."
  Wolfram, haughty; —" Seest thou any
Grace of God then, when a poet
Ridicules God's own commandments,

Broken troth and breach of duty
Holding up as bright examples;—
All those shameful wicked actions
Glossing o'er with gilded phrases?
When he limns with so much gusto
All the arts of tricky rivals,—
Passion's glamour, wanton lustings
And the senses' godless longings,—
How betrayal and deception
Confidence destroy and shatter?
Rather should the world avoid him;—
Even if the holy angels
Friendly greeting bade me offer,
All my life long I would scorn it!
  But there are inferior poets,
Shallow pated,—hollow hearted,—
Who can write of naught but passion;—
Over humble christian duty,
Over faith's most holy precepts
Find delight in bold extolling
Earthly pleasures,—sensual longings;—
Who in their inferior verses
Call the poet who seriously
Treats of verities eternal,
"Old fantastic visionary"—
And a—"Withered up old tree-trunk."
  Steadfastly at Ofterdingen
Wolfram had his glance directed,
As if for him were intended
These his words of spleeny rancor.
  Now Tannhäuser broke his silence,
Claimed attention, and with effort
Keeping down his ruffled temper,
Said with forced apparent calmness;—

"Wolfram! Thou revil'st a talent
Which thou never wert possessed of,—
Since to thee God has denied it.
No one can esteem thy Grail King,
At its splendid diction wonder,
More than I do,— and I censure
That attack of Master Gottfried.
  But allow to others merit;—
Who in place of gloomy tenets,
Of fine philosophic phrases,
Of quite useless speculation
Merrier deities have chosen;—
Who describe Earth's various pleasures
As a charmful round of pastime,
In enjoyment pleasure finding;—
Who the joys of passion picture
In the richest flowery language,
Set to sweetest strains of music;—
Love's devotion glorifying
As thou canst not,— noble Wolfram!
And I solemnly maintain it,—
There is no one in this circle
Who can rival Master Gottfried's
Poem of Tristan and Isolde."
  Wolfram — jeering,— "Meanest,— not so?
Save the Knight of Ofterdingen!
Thou would'st pluck the stars from Heaven,
Make of them thy shining garland,—
Gain with song and sheer insistance
Wanton lust and coarse enjoyments,
Such as mortals ne'er conceived of."
"Yes!" By Heaven! — cried Tannhäuser;—
"Yes, and yes! a thousand times—, yes!
The old legend of Prometheus

Comes to mind, who from the eternal
Flames of Heaven fetched his fire ; —
That well suits me, I will follow it,—
A position I will win me
Such as mortal never conquered,—
And whoever strives to oppose me,
Let him try it! Yield I will not!
To no rival will I yield me,—
But defiant as the Titans
Will contend with every comer
Who disputes my onward progress."
"O thou fool!"— said Wolfram, angered ; —
"Thinkest thou with silly love songs
To ascend the famed Olympus?
Look! There dwell thy chosen deities,—
Arid, dissolute,— abandoned,—
Like the mountain where they habit.
To their mean and wicked worship
Is thy wanton heart given over ; —
Go and dwell there in the Hörsel,—
And reposing 'gainst the bosom
Of some cunning shameless harlot,
Grovel to her shameless level,—
Ever damned by God's commandments!"
"Wolfram! draw! 'tis mortal combat!
Cover! cover!"— shrieked Tannhäuser ; —
Quick their naked swords were flashing,
But between them rushed the others
And arose a furious uproar,—
Threatening, chiding, murmuring, warning.
Marshal Henry Eckartsberge
In the name of Hermann ordered ; —
"Sheathe thy weapon, Ofterdingen!
He who breaks the peace at Wartburg

Is a doomed man from that instant."
Walter then to Ofterdingen;—
"Henry! by thy knightly honor,
Tame thy hasty lawless passion!
Here are thirty puissant weapons,—
To oppose us were but folly.
The arisen controversy
Is with minstrel art connected;—
Neither is it customary
In the place of proofs and reasons
To contend with deadly weapons;—
Minstrel fame and high position
Naked swords can never conquer;—
Fight your quarrel out with verses!"
"Walter! you are right,— I thank you!"
Cried Tannhäuser;—"I intended
To contend as poet and minstrel;—
That intention I will hold to.
To a contest I defy all,
For supreme position striving;—
Either to surpass my lyrics,
Or to yield the victor's laurel;—
Coward he who shirks the contest!"
"*Défi* taken,"—flung back Wolfram,—
"Glove picked up in deadly earnest;—
Genius dallies not with trifles,
Life and death must be the issue;—
Coward he who shirks the contest!"
Sudden horror seized the minstrels,
On all faces was depicted.
None had ever blanched at bloody
Duels in the lists of honor,
Trenchant lance thrusts, death in battle,—
But to hazard life in singing

To them seemed grotesquely frightful,
Meanwhile like a Jupiter Tonans
Sculpt from marble, unapproachable,
Stood the mighty poet, Wolfram,—
With his fixed and piercing glances
Cold and steadfast eying Henry.
  Then ensued a death-like silence,
None a single comment ventured,
Nor did Walter,—all were gazing
At the pair;—Tannhäuser's visage
Seemed a little extra pallid,
But his eyes shot forth defiance
As his lips took up the challenge
Ringingly:—"'Tis life and death then!"
  To the minstrels turned then Wolfram
Saying, as he faced the others;—
"We are five experienced minstrels
'Gainst one singly, but I stand for
The whole number;—Walter! set the
Month and day to end the wager,
As required by chivalrous usage;
Then until be peace between all!"

  A commotion quite unwonted
Was aroused at Castle Wartburg
By the quite astounding rumor
Of the challenge to a singing
Duel, on whose fatal issue
A great minstrel's death depended.
'Twas not only women trembled,
Hearing the unheard of wager,—
—Fateful as the day of judgment—
But the menfolk and the knights too
Consternation manifested.

Hermann seethed with furious passion; —
On the heights of Wartburg Mountain
To all peaceful arts devoted,
Life's enjoyments, music, poetry,—
Famed for giving aid and refuge
To all God-inspired poets,
— Not forgetting strolling artists —
There be fought out such a contest,
One or the other's death compelling?
Never! he forbade the duel.
But the minstrels further threatened
In some other jurisdiction
To select their field of battle,
So he sought between the rivals
Milder terms and stipulations
To procure by intervention; —
For the loser in their contest
Any forfeit save death only; —
But in vain,— for knightly challenge
Had been offered and accepted; —
And unless agreed the rivals
Power was none to annul it.
Ofterdingen's fiery ardor,
Eschenbach's hauteur unbending
And his marbly disposition
No hope gave of peaceful issue.
Each full power had given to Walter,
And to Hermann he had promised
As the tourney's highest umpire
To provide himself four colleagues,—
To deliver righteous judgment
Swearing on his knightly honor.
And Spervogel? — With Tannhäuser

Quarreled he beyond all measure,—
Calling him a silly youngster
In a stupid trick detected;—
Styled the wager God-forsaken,
Quite foolhardy and audacious,
Sinful, shameful and unreasoning.
"Would that I had left at Strasburg
That unlucky poem of Gottfried's,
Which such mischief has occasioned!
'Tis not the chief actors only
Punished are for sinful passion,—
But it seems that those who read it
Also with the bad must suffer."
"Thou art not so very far out!"
Said Tannhäuser,—"for in passion
Dormant lie two mighty forces,
Beatific and malignant;
And whoever toys with passion,
He must care take angel spirits
To enlist in his own service;—
Otherwise the prince of darkness
With his devils gets possession,
Into error drives his victim,
Weaves around him evil fortunes
Over generations lasting,—
With their consequences troubling
Unconnected virtuous persons.
But be tranquil! Over passion
I am master,—and the angels
Willing will my summons answer,—
Also devils, if I need them.
Therefor 'tis that confidently
To the contest I look forward,—
But there's something for thy action

More important than this chiding.
  Go as quick as you can get there
To Burg Scharfenberg, and carry
Irmgard my respects and greeting; —
Say I wish her to excuse me
For my lengthy absence from her;
Also that I long to see her
And will shortly come to Scharf'berg.
That will serve as explanation,
But the object is to hinder
Irmgard's learning of this duel.
  Trust Beata with the secret,
Tell her all before she hears it
Elsewhere,—and then runs and tells it.
Make her swear to you on honor
On this subject to be silent
When in presence of her mistress,—
And to do her best to compass
That no other person carries
Irmengard the least fore-knowledge,—
And especial that no menial,
— To my own announcement previous —
To the châtelaine shall tell it.
Hast thou understood, old fellow?"
  "Was it that?"— the stroller muttered,
Pond'ring, and then nodding at him; —
"Of this matter were you thinking,
This occasion were you planning,
When you told me of some errand
For me early to accomplish?"
  No! 'Twas quite another matter,
More important, somewhat harder,—
Go about that thou may'st also; —
'Tis to bring me certain knowledge

Whether Irmgard's quondam consort,
Ritter Kurt von Scharfenberge,
Breathes yet,— or is dead and buried.
Under royal Otto's colors
He enlisted and for years gone
Of his safety nothing known is.
Please take notice,— not for my sake
Is this errand, but for Irmgard's,—
That the question may be settled,
Whether she be wife or widow."
"That's an easier undertaking,"
Said the stroller,— "and I promise
Sure intelligence to get you;—
My belovéd flock of children
I will quickly set in motion,
All the strollers in the empire;—
As the swarms of hornets scattering,
They shall question, listen, rummage,—
But for my part I'll not leave you
Till your coming singing contest
On the Wartburg has been settled;—
Then I'll go myself a-strolling,
If my thigh bones, old and brittle,
Don't refuse to do their duty."
"Good! that leaves you six days longer
For your needful preparations;—
Hurry now to Scharfenberge,
Keep the women there from babbling!"

VII

BEFORE THE CONTEST

Each succeeding dawn of morning
Nearer brought the day of contest,—
News of which around the country
Speedily was widely spreading.
At the neighboring towns and castles
Knights and ladies diligently
Were preparing for the occasion,—
When they hoped to be invited
To the spacious and imposing
Hospitable halls of Wartburg.
Soon 'twas known among the peasants
Near the Scharfenberge dwelling,—
And Beata found it irksome
To prevent some accidental
Word from reaching Irmgard's hearing.
Very much was she regretting
That Spervogel she had given
Such a sworn and solemn promise
Not to speak about the wager.
Interested was Beata
In her mistress Irmgard's welfare,—

And if she could only tell her
What a menacing misfortune
In her love dream was impending,
She would certainly have managed
From herself and Ofterdingen
Some way to avert the issue.
Still his promise he had given
To explain it all to Irmgard ;—
That done,— she, Beata, would not
Lose a single minute, but would
Interfere and warn both parties.
  Also 'mid the minstrel circle
Brooded secret apprehension.
Wolfram, who was not the aggressor
But the challenge had accepted,
Willed to represent the others,—
And alone, for all contending,
Death inflict, or bravely perish.
No one seemed to hold it likely
That the famous minstrel author
By aught other could be worsted.
No one even for a moment
Would allow the thought a foothold,—
They might lose the mighty Wolfram.
  In the case of Ofterdingen,
Whose attainments all the others
More suspected than were sure of,
Bare him also the four colleagues
Love and good will fully equal.
Eschenbach they deeply reverenced,
Filled with wonder at his genius,—
But the Knight of Ofterdingen
Closer crept had to their heartstrings.

And to them it seemed quite monstrous,
— An impiety forever —
That of the two noble singers
Either, in the prime of manhood,
At the height of his great genius,
For the phantom, Fame, should perish.
  Ah! No easy method was there
To undo the Gordian tangle.
Helplessly they talked it over,
But confronting each proposal
Loomed the rigid Code of Honor,
Insurmountable and rooted.
Biterolf, Reinmar von Zweter
And the Moral Author, Heinrich,
Still had hopes of some adjustment; —
Once again as interceder
Walter von der Vogelweide
Should make trial,— ascertaining
If it were not practicable
To arrange some milder forfeit.
  Walter said; —"You don't believe it; —
If 'twere bade me Wartburg Castle
To transport from yonder summit
To the top of Inselsberge,
That could scarcely be much harder
Than 'twill be the stubborn Wolfram
Or Tannhäuser's pride to soften.
But I'll make another effort,
Words and wishes vainly wasting; —
Hopeless is it but I'll do it,—
— No untried expedient leaving,
Since 'twill pacify my conscience."

Walter, who as guest of Hermann
Dwelt within the Wartburg precincts,
Found his friend at home in quarters
Nicely furnished as his lodging
With Herr Gottschalk, his good landlord.
In his chamber, backward, forward,
He was pacing and dictating
To his skilled amanuensis;
But he instantly dismissed him,—
In a moment comprehending
That his noble friend and caller
Was not come on trifling business.
But when with no hesitation
To him Walter put the question,
If some way he had not thought of
To compose their differences
And to settle honorably
The impending deadly wager,—
In negation motioned Wolfram,
Saying with gloomy expression;—
To this baleful minstrel contest
Challenged us the Knight Tannhäuser
And his *défi* we accepted,—
For the others myself answering;—
Consequently I am bounden.
Not as pastime but in earnest
Shall I go to Wartburg Castle,
There to meet this crucial issue,—
Doubtful whether I shall ever
Living make the homeward journey;—
Spoken words are quite as rigid
As a javelin's oak handle."
"You provoked him,"—answered Walter,—
"To extremest measures drove him

With your acrimonious comments,
Since those slurring words of Gottfried
Had thy anger so excited."
"I!—provoked him?"—answered Wolfram;
"Art thou then so simple minded,
Not to see that Ofterdingen
With the shame of that occasion
To insult me long had purposed?
He alone of that assemblage
Read had Tristan and Isolde,—
Also knew that Tristan's author
Gibe on gibe was aiming at me;—
That gave Ofterdingen pleasure,—
'Twas his envious disposition
Caused that scene of defamation."
"That suspicion is unfounded,"—
Said then Walter,—"don't believe it!
Quite offhand and not deceitful,
Neither envious, is Tannhäuser;—
Hot blood runs in all his arteries,—
What he thinks he rash expresses
With his hand upon his sword grip.
He, a man of brilliant courage,
Yet is but a child in wisdom;—
Added to that,— highly flattered
By the princes and the ladies,
Which has made his pathway easy,—
And he greatly stands in need of
Friendly interest and guidance."
"First break down his haughty spirit,"
Muttered Wolfram;—"he then later
May turn out subdued and gracious.
Thou hast thyself told in verses
That one cannot rule bad children

With a slender willow osier; —
So Tannhäuser; — only ruin
By the heavy hand of Fortune
Will suffice to cure his folly,
And I will convince him of it,—
For my song shall lay him prostrate,
As the lightning rends and shivers."
"Thanks! for underneath thy threat'ning
Seems to me I can distinguish
That thy wrath is tinged with mercy; —
That thou only hast a mind to
Humble Ofterdingen's spirit,
And not to the scaffold push him,—
So I go away quite hopeful."
"Nothing hope from me!" — cried Wolfram,
"Both old trees and younger saplings
Under tension may be broken."

To Tannhäuser then went Walter,—
Him in jovial humor finding.
With the stroller he was sitting
In the landlord's shady arbor,—
While before them on the table
Stood a tall capacious pitcher
And two goblets, doing service;
On Spervogel's well worn fiddle,
Each in turn, they had been playing,—
Also merry ballads singing.
With a joyous heart-felt welcome
Ofterdingen greeted Walter; —
"Thou hast come quite opportunely,
Wine and ballads go together,—
Sit thee down, my ancient crony!
Comrade! get another goblet

Quickly for our worthy guest here!
It is Meissner white wine,— Walter!
Quite transparent,— I can praise it."
  Walter answered; — "Making merry
'Tis, I find thee,— Ofterdingen!
Would that I could bring thee pleasure!
But I seek an earnest parley."
  "Thou hast brought thyself, dear Walter!
That's enough to give me pleasure.
I can guess what 'tis that brings thee
Here to seek another meeting,
Clouding up thy genial visage.
'Tis some further stipulation
Of our wager,— not worth mention.
If important, tell me quickly!
Unimportant,— then say nothing!
  When I think of that occasion,
I'm elated; — you well know it,
There is nothing more alluring,—
Nothing to me so enticing
As the summons to a conflict;
And now comes the greatest battle
Of my life excepting always
Those I've waged with my own passions; —
Weapons, harp and minstrel prowess!
Adversary? Couldn't find a
Mightier on this planet,— and the
Battle's hazard my existence!
  Now I ask you frankly, Walter!
Isn't it glorious, fighting battles?
Confident and lightly armored
Shall I plunge in, all things risking,—
Skill and honor,— fame and life too; —
Which will triumph, knoweth no one.

But sufficient! Like these goblets,
Overflows my heart with courage,—
In our social tipple join us,—
Don't refuse, man! We're alive yet!
Deo volente,— not the last time!"

Then the minstrels and the stroller,
Whom they treated with all honor
As if born to equal station,
Sat them down and drained their goblets.
Seeing Ofterdingen's bearing,
On the subject of his mission
Walter could not get a word in,—
And his better judgment told him
Vain would be all words and pleadings.
This man, filled with martial ardor,
Close at hand a deadly struggle,
Seemed as glad as 'twere a battle
Which a throne would yield the victor.
Ought he then to shake his courage,
In his skill sap his reliance,—
Telling him his own forebodings?
Never,— never! — nothing saying,
Sat he down with the companions,—
Over Meissner making merry.
"Fiddle King,— thou faithful fellow,—
Long time since I've seen you,"— said he; —
"You old fiddling bird of passage,—
Tell me,— does the Rhine continue
Flowing by old Worms as usual?"
"Yes, as usual, always running,—
Can't stand still,"— replied the stroller,
"Just like us who have no country; —
Only he, forever youthful,

Never tires of urging onward,—
But we poor and wretched cripples
Bear our years with difficulty."
  Walter said,—"the Rhine well knows too
That its distant journey leads to
Holland's rich and level meadows;—
Tell me,—where do mortals go to?"
  "Wretched climax!"—cried Tannhäuser,—
"Disappointed, voiceless, silent,
Thus in Ocean's sands extinguished!
Were I Father Rhine, I'd tumble
From the steepest craggiest ledges
Thundrous in the Ocean's whirlpool;—
Leaping, roaring, would I perish,—
Then forever disappearing!"
  Said Spervogel;—"Cant agree, Sir,
Much prefer a nobby inscription;—
Walter! when you find my headstone,
On it write a witty couplet!"
  "Pray,—take note of his pretensions!"
Laughed out Walter,—"wants a tombstone
With a eulogy upon it,—
To his virtues testifying.
Well,—suppose we start in this way;—
"Here doth rest an honest spirit,"
  "Spirit! would you pack down also
Under stones my precious spirit?"
  "That won't do,"—said Ofterdingen,—
"First his soul in Purgatory
Must atone for errors youthful."
  "Well! it was a blunder, rather,"—
Said then Walter,—"Better this way;"
"Lies hereunder an old fiddler,—
Jovial, faithful, true and needy,

King and Master of all strollers; —
May his followers rest as peaceful
And as silent as this stroller."
"Thank you sir,— and you, Sir Henry,—
Please remember and repeat it
Some day to good Master Steinmetz."
"Now for my own epitaphium,"—
Spoke up Walter,— "Speak,— what think'st thou?"
"That is easy done,— this only;"—
"To your knees! — Here sleeps the poet,—
Walter von der Vogelweide;"—
Nothing further,— your name carries
Greater fame than words can picture."
"Add thereto,— "no person ever
Bowed to him,— nor he to others; —
Emperor's friend and Rome's opponent,
Of the birdies special favorite; —
This one little spot of turfage
Is his poor and sole possession."
Comprehended? — Well then, Stroller!
Please to pull yourself together,—
That we two may find another
Good one for our Tannen-hussar."
"O ye merry undertakers!" —
Laughed out Henry,— "spare your trouble!
If in person,— while yet living —
I can't rear a lasting token,
Shall not do it Master Steinmetz."
"Hear thy epitaphium must thou,"—
Said Spervogel; — "Give attention!
"This stone under rests a noble,
Once within an ace of monkhood; —
Would have made a worthy bishop
But too frigid was his cloister

And too crooked was the crozier,"
"Oh,— thou rascal!"— interrupted
Ofterdingen;— "Was 't not thyself,
From the pious path of virtue
Led me off with chat and fiddle?"—
"Sir! upon my death-bed pillow
Where before long I must rest me,
That will never bring repentance;—
And I wish you just as many
And as jolly careless moments
As in my life I have counted;
Honor be your buckler bearer,
Good luck be thy constant portion!"
"That's a good wish,"— cut in Walter,—
"Listen now to my proposal!"
"Once a fellow dove hereunder;—
Seeking rest from life's afflictions,
Think you?— No! he sought a woman
Down below there,— since above ground
No one found he to his liking."
Merry laughed the three carousers,—
"Now, come on!"— proceeded Walter;
"Fiddling, fighting, planning, wooing,
All these have their times of action,—
For this moment best suits tippling;
Living mortals need no head stones,—
Once more over foaming goblets
Let us drink and toast each other,—
Come, dear friends,— we're all alive yet!
Please God, 'twill not be the last time!"
Thus they merry made and chatted,
Drinking wine, till Walter left them.
Then the knowing stroller-fiddler

Ofterdingen's gelding saddled
And to Irmgard rode the minstrel.

Was this proud and high strung poet,
Thinking over his position,
Really, truly quite as reckless
Or in fact as sure of vict'ry,
As he seemed in Walter's judgment?
Wolfram's high attainments weighing,
Sometimes 'twas so,— then he doubted,
But what mainly courage gave him
Was his faith in his good angel,—
For the dictum of that goddess
As a safeguard he considered.
Yet another mighty influence
Occupied his mind and kept him
Free from worries of the future,—
Binding him with soft embraces
To the present,— it was Irmgard.
Those his youthful indiscretions
Misty, nebulous, forgotten;
That was passion, ardent, headstrong,
Not love unalloyed, imperial;—
Make-believe suns,— borrowed lustres,—
Not the heaven enthronéd planet
In its native splendor shining.
But what now was constant pressing
Through his brain and in his bosom;—
Countless burning aspirations,
Thoughts seductive,— rosy visions
Changing and kaleidoscopic,—
Always present or recurring,
Sometimes welling from his bosom
— Their primeval spring and fountain,—

Sometimes like a radiant vision
Downward floating from the heavens,—
With him walking, with him sleeping,
Part and parcel of his being; —
For all this but one name had he,
Summed up all in one sole person,—
Irmgard! Irmgard! — all else nothing.
  She it was, his high ideal,
— Whom so often he had dreamed of—
Whom he now was contemplating
With the eye of human passion,—
Deemed her more than other women
With the charm of beauty dowered.
  Super-added to her person
So attractive to his senses,—
By the wish to bind together
In one sheaf with Irmgard's nature
All his own soul's ardent longings
Was he wholly dominated.
Never had he felt this impulse
In him stirring with such power,—
A celestial spirit seeming,
Superhuman,— everlasting.
  Hence he jumped to the conclusion,—
Irmgard was the one sole woman
By decree of Fortune destined
To compose his heart unrestful
And completely crown his wishes.
Such celestial boundless passion
— On this earth-ball unexampled—
He, imperious, deeply craving,
For himself alone desiring
As a god to win and hold it,—
This he hoped to find in Irmgard,

With her all exchanging equal.
  Still remained the crucial question; —
Neither spoken nor by token
Had she ever made confession
Whether she returned his passion
With the selfsame glowing ardor
He experienced; — was she willing
All restraint to break away from,
Making him a full surrender?
  At the earliest occasion,
Of this sole remaining issue
For an ending he was hoping.
What delight if only Irmgard
Overcome with love and passion
Should confess her heart emotions,—
Opening him the sanctuary
Of her careful hidden secrets,
And her inmost thought and feeling!
If against her coveted bosom
He could grasp in all its beauty
Woman's spiritual nature!
Love in its supreme expression! —
But quite clearly saw Tannhäuser,
By remaining at a distance
Irmgard he could never conquer; —
And his passion carried with it
Eager longing to possess her.

  Gottfried's Tristan and Isolde
Irmgard now was pond'ring over.
At the beauty of the verses
She was filled with admiration,—
Ravished,— and withal astonished; —
But her nature quite revolted

At the disregard of duty
And the scenes of lawless passion
In the most impassioned manner
By the poem's author painted.
It was Henry who had sent her
Gottfried's volume and inscribed it
To her with the initial letters
Of their four names pair-wise coupled,—
And that made it very certain,—
Their position he considered
Was the same as there depicted
'Twixt Sir Tristan and Isolde.
Very anxious that thought made her,
For she saw in that inscription
Boldly set forth and outspoken
His condonement of their errors,
And of Isolt's breach of wifehood.
Well she knew,— what one approves of
He is also bold inclined to
Imitate and follow after.
Yes,— she might as well confess it,—
That the fancies of the senses
And the tempting love example
Of the dazzling Queen Isolde
With such skillful pencil painted,
Ev'n the strongest sense of duty
Might o'ercome in time of trial.
Vacant had been her affections,
Unfulfilled her heart's desire; —
Cupid now was smiling,— wooing,—
Passion beckoning and urging; —
"Give and take? Yes! — if I free were."

Henry came and much embarrassed
Were the lovers at their meeting; —
This in the other each one noticed,
And that each was secret striving
From the other to conceal it.
So they talked on casual subjects
Lugged their conversation into,—
Not of what was to them nearest.
  Tristan and Isold' avoiding
They conversed on various matters,
Of that subject dreading mention,—
Till their stock of topics narrowed
And their conversation halted, —
Making any further dallying
More embarrassing than mention.
  Final, as 'twere accidental,
Henry made a slight allusion
To the poem, and quickly streamed forth
Quite a flood of conversation,—
Each one gave their mild approval; —
Full expression neither ventured
Of their pent up secret feelings.
  But their thoughts as yet unspoken,
Yet unwhispered,— quite unerring
Eyes admitted; — sending tokens
Of affection forward, backward,—
And, forgetting circumspection,
Well defined and close alliance
At a distance entered into; —
As ambassadors, corrupted,
Of their sovereign lord and master
Disobey the plain instructions.
  Irmgard and the Knight Tannhäuser
Gazed and gazed at one another,

— Love betraying as unmeasured,
Of such sympathy expressive —
As if Brangwain's potent philtre
Each not only was advised of,
But had drained it to the bottom.
Why then were they both dissembling?
First and foremost fettered Irmgard
Adamantine sense of duty,
While Tannhäuser's sheer existence
Hung upon the minstrel contest; —
If his skill should now desert him,
Love and passion were superfluous.
Hence his silence, till at Wartburg
Should eventuate the issue.
It was now his bounden duty
Of his wager to tell Irmgard; —
With composure feignéd spoke he,—
In jocose and flippant language
Fain to represent the contest
As possessing slight importance; —
Till through Irmgard's eager questions
And her ever rising wonder
Gradually was unfolded
The true purport of the wager.
"Friend! thy wager is no trifle,"—
Said she,— danger not suspecting; —
"Thus as minstrel thyself pitting
'Gainst the mighty champion, Wolfram."
Said he;— "Each will try to conquer,
But our styles are quite divergent,—
Varying much in tone and measure."
"Oh! I know that thou wilt surely
Do thy best, and if thou winnest
As a victor I shall greet thee

As none other," — said she gaily; —
" To the contest I am going,
And an amulet I'll give thee
Which inspiréd strength will lend thee; —
What then is the victor's trophy?"
" For his brow a golden circlet,"—
Ill at ease and slow he answered,
More interrogation fearing.
" Hermann is a princely giver;
If thou art not victor even,
It will never be forgotten
But be talked of through all ages,—
How with Germany's great minstrel
For the guerdon thou contendedst; —
Next to famous Wolfram ranking
Is no shame,— 'tis a great honor; —
What's the forfeit for the loser?"
" Must thou know that also Irmgard?"
" How! you wish to keep it secret?
Speak it out! Thou seem'st bewildered!
What's the forfeit for the loser?"
" Execution by the headsman!"—
" Henry!!"— Irmgard's shriek of terror
Echoed through the kemenate.
In such wise speaks that love only
Which scents danger for its object; —
And if never tell-tale glances,
Neither words nor kiss nor hand-clasp
Had to him betrayed her feelings,
That one cry was now sufficient
To inform him,— Yes, she loves thee!
Trembling, pale as death stood Irmgard,
Melancholy, dazed, despairing,—
As if asking; — " This to Irmgard?"

But she instant recollected
That she had betrayed her secret,—
Then supreme exertion making,
Quick recovering she begged him;—
"Henry! to myself now leave me!
And may all the holy angels
Guard thee and protect thy fortunes!"
Words of comfort then he offered,—
But with deprecating gesture
She repelled him,—from her boddice
Took a corded osseous relic,
Like a roseleaf carved and fashioned;—
This she gave him, and he pressed it
To his lips,—Ah! it was warm from
Irmengard's own burning bosom.
Then light-hearted off he galloped,
Of a double vict'ry dreaming.

VIII

THE MINSTREL DUEL

With sure and irresistible advance
The daylight now was breaking through the clouds; —
As if to favor man's reposeful slumber
The glimmering light with its gray wings enfolded
The mountains, valleys, and the quiet forests
Already morning air and daybreak scenting.
'Twixt Sky and Earth a luminous line was visible,—
While indistinctly showed their huge proportions
The mountain ridges 'bove the gloom projecting.
Its rugged mass from night's embrace emerging,
Most like some lofty battlemented castle
Above the fog the Wartburg's peak arose,—
Spectral and dreadful as a hangman's beam
Which on some mountain summit direful looms.
This way and that, piled up in floating masses,
Eastward are slowly moving threatening clouds,—
Here spherical, there wide dispersed and cloven
By ashy streaks slight touched with pinkish glister,—
But fast becoming ruddy in the sunlight,
While more and more by colored flashes rifted.

Kaleidoscopic change the fickle colors,—
Purple prevails, with streaks of golden color
Which tint each separate cloud with shining fringes.
The rampart sinks, and rays of light shoot up
Which high in Heaven against the arching gray
Unfold themselves in fanlike shape and fashion,—
Until at length the mole is breached in spots
And seems the prey of wide spread conflagration;
While fiery flashing gleams a crimson glow,
And in his silent and majestic power
Above the horizon mounts the blood-red Phoebus.
The mountains light up and their summits glisten
With morning dew,— all life is fresh awaking,—
The cocks are crowing and the larks are soaring; —
The forest's waking voices now are heard
And joyous greet the gloomy darkness' conqueror.
The day is come and smilingly advances,
In its imperial majesty and mercy
On all created beings gracious beaming.

Upon the outer barriers' lofty rampart
Stood Landgrave Hermann, sad and earnest gazing
Adown the pleasant sun-illumined valley.
With inspiration deep the balmy zephyrs
He was inhaling, but their fragrant wooing
No comfort brought his overburdened spirit,
And failed his clouded anxious look to banish.
The sun he earnest watched, which unconstrainable
Above the wood was high and higher mounting.
Ah! if the power he had to stay his motion,—
That on the sun-dial the indicator
The hour might fail to point, whose fatal number
Stared him in face as if with blood 't were painted;
His mind one single thought was occupying:

"When of this fateful day the light has vanished,
Will have departed from this Earth a minstrel; —
Forever hushed a joyous tuneful voice."
The land was his,— this pleasant bounteous land;
Thüringians dwelt within his jurisdiction
Beyond those verdant slopes and mountain ranges
Which to the horizon stretched away continuous,
Farther extending than his eye could wander.
The emperor's might with arms he had resisted,
With arméd force made good his own pretensions
To rank as sovereign free and independent;
Yet here, within his bounds, before that moment
And two contending minstrels he was powerless,—
Had bound himself by princely word and promise
An act to sanction with his personal presence
Which sore oppressed his heart with dire foreboding.
Dejected, back and forward he was pacing,
Regarding not the gorgeous summer flowers
Along the balmy hill-sides freely scattered,
The busy bustling artisans not heeding
Who, noisily in halls and courtyard pounding,
With echoing din already were commencing
Their preparations for a kind of fest day,
The which nor host nor guests had ever witnessed.
To hold the tourney had assented Hermann,
And now to escape turmoil and the confusion
To the outer walls his footsteps had directed,
Where he to walk alone was oft accustomed
When noxious thoughts his consciousness were harrying,
And weightiest resolves he was debating.
So found him there his spouse the Duchess Sophie,
And reaching him her hand, addressed him smiling:
"I knew it well, my friend, where I must seek thee,—
Thou would'st avoid this day's appointed contest,

Thy melancholy mood art fain to conquer,—
But thy tormenting thoughts hast failed to banish,
So clearly read upon thy clouded forehead."
"Why was I born such woeful day to experience?
I curse my own existence,"— cried the Landgrave;
"Too hastily my word I pledged,— am bounden,—
No longer master in my ducal castle."
"Hermann, that is not true!" spoke up the Duchess,—
"No blame attaches thee,— thou hast not erréd,—
Abatement none thy might and power have suffered.
Bethink thee! Always thou hast been to minstrels
A trusty friend and bountiful protector;—
Wherever in the land a song resoundeth,
Wherever sings a master poet creative
Of ancient myths,— whoever bold achievements,
Love's ecstasy, sweet springtime's life and pleasures,
In pleasant and melodious verse describeth,—
Thy part thou hast therein;—in all the empire
The noble art no one protects as thou.
From all directions gather here the minstrels,
As thy most favored guests they are receivéd,—
Their worth hast prized, hast raised their aspirations,
And deluged them with kindnesses and honors.
Their courage rose, they felt within their bosoms
Inspired power, by God himself implanted,
Which neither pope nor emperor could give them.
And when abroad 'twas said that Landgrave Hermann
All artists hearty welcomes, loves and honors,
Then many others thy example followed,—
But none with thee can vie in cordiality.
An end thou mad'st of their erstwhile proscription,
No more they stroll in search of beggar's rations,—
Thou gav'st and gav'st, the joyful poets enrichedst;—
Without rich gifts and thy appreciation
From Wartburg's threshold none has e'er departed."

"Thou'rt boasting, Sophie,"— smiling said the Landgrave,
"Because those things I've done which bring me pleasure."
"Exactly so, because it makes thy pleasure;
The singers praise thy name in every fashion,
Their friend and their protector recognizing,—
Who understands and with them sympathizes
And to each gives his lawful meed of honor.
As long as dwell their grateful songs in memory,
So long will call mankind throughout the ages
Hermann von Thüringen the Artist's Patron."
"And thee with me, dear spouse! for thou deservest
Equal to share with me,— the nobles know it
And hold thee high in honor; — but Ah! Sophie!
This single day will blot out all forever; —
In place of memories of benefits
Our names with blame and curses dire will cover."
"No, friend! a brighter issue I am hoping,
But if God wills an outcome sanguinary
The world will know 'twas not thy fault at all; —
The minstrels' friend would never slay a minstrel,—
What human strength could do the strife to hinder,
That has been done,— thy name is proof enough."
"God bless my loving, wise, and noble consort!
With new born hope my heart thou hast inspired;"
"I knew I should,— but come, my dearest friend,
Upon our service waits our gala raiment; —
Our conference let us now terminate
And in our ducal garments straightway clothe us
In preparation for our princely duties."

Meantime a noisy din, unintermittent,
Of servitors and busy artisans
With deafening roar prevailed in all directions

The castle grounds within, express intended
The festal pomp ingeniously to heighten,
And everywhere all eyes delight and dazzle.
  The Seneschal, Herr Gerhard Atze, trotted
About,— short legged and breath'd, profusely blowing,
His face bedewed with drops of perspiration,
Bidding and scolding, posing Jack at all trades,
Persistent up and down the staircase running,
The serving-men and maids and boys to bully,
Who nothing cared for what was said by Atze,—
The little coxcomb, when with frightful bluster,
All blue with rage he threatened hellish torments,
But — not yet hanged — behind his back derided.
  At all the entrances they placed small fir-trees,
All arches, pillars, posts, with garlands covered,
Wound close with twining woodbines all the columns,
Along the paths strewed earth and scattered flowers,—
Into a garden the approach transforming.
On walks and staircases they laid down carpets
And bordered all the steps with forest green'ry,—
They hung long parti-colored cloths out windows,
And from the balconies they let down streamers.
Above the gates and doors devices glittered,
Flowers, tableaus and twigs, and words of welcome ;
Bright ribands waved and little banners fluttered.
  With sofas halls and chambers were provided,
And pretty cushions and embroidered bolsters
And shoulder tidies placed on all the settles.
On all the walls shone suits of burnished armor,
With helmets, shields and many foreign weapons
Brought home as booty from the Eastern Country.
The splendid ducal silver service dazzled,—
Show vases, ornaments, reception salvers,
Carved work and bric-a-brack, lay on the tables.

On all sides glittered metals and bright colors,
The rarest flowers, precious stuffs and jewels,—
While tireless moved about the household servants
In palace, knights' apartments, kitchen, cellar,—
And nimble maids the clothing chests exploited,
And not one hand was sluggish or at leisure.
There was much laughing, taunting, merry-making,
As well as disputation, nodding, whisp'ring,—
For many claimed to have precisest knowledge
Of wondrous things to hap on this occasion.
'Twas evident, 'mid all the preparation
There brooded a mysterious chilling terror,—
And 'neath this ill defined but general fear
The jokes and jests were forced and not spontaneous.
Meantime quite orderly the work proceeded,—
The settle backs were put in place and fastened,
The final hammer-strokes at last were given
And everything swept up and cleared of rubbish;—
Then each and all to make their toilets hastened
And dressed themselves in holiday apparel.
About the smiling valley loomed the Wartburg
In the sunshine so bright with gala colors,
With waving streamers and with flutt'ring banners,
To all it seemed to extend the warmest greeting,—
To commoners, as well as those invited.
And now the earliest guests were seen arriving
On rich accoutred horses,— valiant barons,
Their stately dames and pretty high-bred daughters,—
While in their trains rode serving men and pages.
And soon came more and more,— the sheds and stables
In Eisenach with horses overfilling,
Since most outside the castle grounds dismounted.
Along the winding mountain road ascended,
Caravanesque, the motley crowd of visitors,

And once arrived met suitable reception.
  The outer gate to a guardhouse admitted,
Garnished and hung with coats of mail and weapons; —
The arriving guests escorted were by ushers
Inside the Kemenat', and to the Commons
Contiguous to the massive outwork towers,—
And there, in name of Landgrave Hermann speaking,
Carver and Seneschal, Marshall and Chamb'rer
Greeted the noble guests,— while youthful pages
The draught of welcome served at bid of butler.
  They chatted,— questions asked in expectation; —
Low conversation and the stately pageant
The time beguiled until the hour to assemble
For the gala procession to the palace.
In the forecourt, the stables and the armory,
The serving men with quarters were provided,—
While on the hillside camped were many strollers,
Who slyly crossed the bridge and gained admittance,—
And no one cared to warn away the dodgers
For mixing in the jolly crowd of burghers.
  Spervogel, who with heavy heart had followed
Tannhäuser's self within the walled inclosure,
An honored place was given among the buglers,—
Enabled thus to witness all that happened.
The minstrels, joined by others from a distance,
Each with his instrument, had long attended
Within their quarters,— waiting on their summons,
But in their separate apartment stationed.
Wolfram von Eschenbach and Ofterdingen
In silence greeting there exchanged, as champions
In tournaments before they drop their lances.

  With Duchess Sophie in her sleeping chamber,
And by the Duchess' special invitation,

Sat Irmengard, and both the high born ladies
In splendid festal robes were rich appareled;—
Bright sparkling coronets set off their tresses
With precious strings of pearls thick interwoven.
  Irmengard's countenance was pale and ashy,
Her full-moon eyes were ringed about with shadows,
The fruit of anxious sleepless nights of vigil;—
The classic lines of her patrician visage,
—Always instinct with intellectual fire—
Of tense anxiety were now expressive,
Which quick observed her friend the Duchess Sophie.
Scarce had the Duchess' maid and waiting women
Finished their tasks, excused from further service,
When she, in Irmgard's pallid features reading,
Said with a look of sympathizing kindness:
  "Like us, thou'rt anxious over the decision
Which must to-day be made between two rivals,—
But cheer up, girl! kind Heaven ruleth all things."
  "Ah! noble dame!"—but Irmgard's lips were trembling,
Her words, broken by sighs, remained unspoken,—
She stopped, to dry her tearful eyes in silence.
  "Irmgard, we are alone!" replied the Duchess,—
"Why call me 'noble dame' in conversation?
Am I not Sophie? best of all thy associates,
To whom thy troubles thou hast always opened?
Out with them now! thy trickling tears betoken
Some grief beyond mere shrinking at a contest,—
Since thou hast seen before far bloodier tourneys,
Only the weapons now are songs, not lances."
  Then Irmgard cried, seizing the Duchess' hands;
"Sophie! can'st thou not save him? If thou can'st not,
I will kneel down before the victor minstrel,
Myself as victim to the headsman offering!
And if 't were all in vain, I have sworn to Heaven

With him to perish in the selfsame hour."
Sophie sprung up,—"Unhappy wife! what say you?
Thou lovest him! and I've no need to question
Which one thou fain would'st save with thy existence;—
Wolfram 't is not, for whom you wish to perish,—
The other 't is,— Tannhäuser thy belovéd."
"Well yes! 'T is true! I'm willing thou should'st know it,—
What he knows not, nor anyone but I."
"He knows it not? Irmgard! he knows it not?"
Erect the Duchess stood as if in judgment,—
Her countenance regarding earnestly.
"Well then! I'll try to save the losing singer,—
For that, Irmgard, thou need'st not even thank me;
For thee I save him not,— thou art espouséd,—
And but the guiltless and untarnished woman
My intimate can be,— forget that not!"
"Of thee thou shalt at all times find me worthy,
But this heart has its own especial beat;
Save him, and do with me then as thou pleasest."
Then came a knocking at the door, announcing
The hour was come to join the ceremonies.

And now advanced from Kemenat' and Commons
The grand procession to the chapel marching,—
Upon the holy mass to lend attendance
Before the opening of the daring contest.
Heralds preceded with their staffs of office
In gold embroidered crimson flowing raiment;
Next came, conspicuous with his grizzled noddle,
Spervogel, at the head of all the buglers,—
With festive music the advance enlivening;
Along he strode with such imperious bearing
As if on him the day's success depended.
The buglers next, a lovely sight succeeded,—

Striplings and maids in bloom of youth and promise.
First high born youths, their graceful forms attired
In modish snugly fitting long sleeved jackets,
Bearing aloft bright pennons on light lances;
Next came the girls with bandeaux round their tresses
Adown their shapely shoulders loosely floating;
The darling creatures all wore costly girdles
And carried wands entwined around with flowers
And narrow brilliant-colored fluttering ribands.
The minstrels followed after, next in order,
Preceded by the chosen loveliest maiden
On either side attended by a stripling
Bearing a naked sword; — she on its cushion
The golden wreath, the tourney's trophy, carried.
In rich apparel were attired the minstrels; —
Begirt with white and gold embroidered mantles
They marched along their gilded lyres bearing,
And each one's head was garlanded with roses.
In file together walked the two contestants
Advancing silent,— followed by the others
In pairs,— and Walter von der Vogelweide
And Otto, Count of Bodenlauben, ended
The imposing minstrel files in whispered converse.
Next came, the Chamberlain and Carver following,
The long array of noblemen and spouses;
Each pair walked hand in hand,— on this occasion
Of rank or preference there was no question.
Costly attire and gems one's eye attracted; —
Whate'er the towns and the baronial castles
Kept well concealed in ancient brass-bound lockers,
—Of festal garments, furs and costly feathers,
Of gold and silver, pearls and precious jewels,—
Was now displayed in all its luxe and splendor
Upon the clothes and weapons of the barons,

And on the stately matrons' buxom persons,—
The eyes of all beholders ravishing.
On necks and bosoms, rounded arms and shoulders,
Were many trinkets,— white and taper fingers
Encircled many a ring,— attire and girdles
Bore many a brooch,— the ladies' shoes and bonnets,
Chapeaux and flowing trains were lace embroidered,
Their silken skirts swept by with quite a rustling.
  Behind the barons came the men unmarried,
Of stalwart men composed and younger scions,—
As skilled in dance as in the art of jousting.
These formed the final ranks of the procession
But not its end,— for many strolling players
Fell in and walked behind the rearmost couples,—
And people who had come as mere spectators,
And little folk from neighboring towns and forest.
  All knew that on the Wartburg kindness governed
In everything,— that naught was there forbidden
Excepting what to God's commands was counter;
Therefor these boldly joined the festive crowd
As if among the invited guests they counted;
They further knew, no hungry men or women
Were ever known to be dismissed from Wartburg.
  Curving around, and loopwise backward folding,
Within the courtyard wound the long procession,—
And those who walked therein could view each other
And smile their greetings; but within the chapel
There was not room enough for all to enter,—
And some perforce remained outside the portals.
  Followed by noblemen and maids of honor
Now entered in the hall the ducal couple;
In princely flowing ermine robes attired
The assembled guests they ceremonious greeted,
Who bowed in turn and made profound obeisance

As way they made to take the highest seats
While echoing rang high mass, invoking Heaven;
Then when the "Ite, missa est" was finished,
Moved on the train unchanged in rank or order,
Until it reached and passed the palace into.
  The poets before, the Duke and Duchess entered
The spacious hall adorned with countless flowers ;—
According to his dignity and standing
Each guest was pointed to his proper station.
The roomy platform on, three steps constructed
Above the floor, the Landgrave and the Duchess
Sat down upon the broad and cushioned sofas,
And near them their most trusty court officials.
  With Duchess Sophie were her maids of honor,
But next to her, at her command, was Irmgard,—
A prey to mingled hope and dark forebodings.
Not far from Hermann's seat lay on a tripod
The blood-red cushion with the golden circlet.
In front of Hermann was a row of settles
On which in crescent form sat down the minstrels,
Thus for the champions leaving an arena,—
While noble guests filled up the main interior
Row upon row, on chairs and benches seated.
The assemblage all a secret awe pervaded,
And brooded moody anxious expectation,
As threatened lightning, o'er the gathered audience ; —
No one was there, but felt their hearts beat quicker.

  Now pounded with his staff the Seneschal,
And all was hushed ; — the Landgrave then arising,
Intent to listen also rose the assembly,—
And he held forth ; —
  " Most noble sirs and ladies !
To come, we asked you, on a certain day

Which from the memory of men and women
I fain would blot out, even if with interest
Compelled I were from my entire existence
Father Time to repay the missing hours.
As guests we bade you here to attend a contest
The like of which no chronicle has mentioned.
The loveliest, the pleasantest and purest,
Which animates the human heart and spirit,—
Which doubles pleasure and destroys our sorrow,
With mystic force uniting friends and foes.
  Poetic art, the might of song and harmony,
Borrowed from peaceful arts, are the sole weapons
In this great contest for the crown of glory.
Two noble singers for the laurel tourney,—
In vain our best we tried to reconcile them;—
The crown of victory, or death, each covets
And neither will to the other, living, yield it.
As arbiter, I undertook the duty,—
But yet in presence of this worthy audience
I fain would speak one last word of remonstrance.
  Wolfram von Eschenbach! I ask of thee,—
Henry von Ofterdingen! Of thee I ask;
This strife to end, does either know a way?
What e'er it is, if in my power it be,
Ask it of me and I will haste to do it."
  In the great hall a deathly silence reigned,—
Intently downward gazed the two contestants,
And neither spoke a single word in answer.
One single look cast Henry Ofterdingen
The anxious face of his belovéd toward,
Therein to read her pardon for his silence
And from her smile to gain some inspiration;—
A guardian spirit seemed to him her presence,
But nothing saw he in her face, as hoped for.

Then from the crescent's centre stepped forth Walter,
Who place had taken twixt the two contestants,
Made reverence and spoke: —
"Most noble Lord and Sovereign Commander!
Thy word is like a star in skies obscured,—
So fixed immovable, so mildly shining,
And full of promise to our trustful wishes.
'T is quite superfluous, but to this truth
Attest I can, before all these thy guests,
That thou hast done, to avoid this deadly issue,
What princely might, what human strength can do,
And no reproach can justly assail thy honor.
But all in vain has been our every effort
To reconcile these two estrangéd minstrels.
As rivals they are bent their skill to measure,—
Let them, I pray thee, Master! have their wishes,—
And may Great God decree in sovereign mercy
That neither conquer,— neither yield to the other."
"Please God so order!" spoke, replying, Hermann,—
"Let each have equal chances in the drawing,
And let our well loved Duchess's hand determine
Which first shall enter on this minstrel battle."
Approaching then the knights, held out the casket
The golden chaplet's beauteous guardian,
And each, in turn, his token placed within it.
Then to the Duchess went the maiden quickly,
Who in the fateful casket her hand plunging
A token drew and held it high in air;—
The pledge it was of Wolfram Eschenbach.
His name the Landgrave called in forceful accents,
And further added,— "I enjoin strict silence
On each and all within these bounds of Wartburg
Until the official ending of the contest.
Wolfram von Eschenbach, do thou commence!"

Wolfram advanced with conscious lofty bearing
A few steps forward, and in silence bowing; —
His features resolution manifested
Together with an earnest sense of duty.
At first, loath to commence and hesitating,
Quite motionless he stands, like bronzen statue,—
While weighs on all now at the singer gazing,
And clouds their thoughts, the deep oppressive silence.
But soon fall gently from the minstrel's lyre
The first low tones; — then ringing full and fuller,—
Wolfram commenced; —

O woeful day! Wide open are the barriers,
Ride on, my song, in dread and mortal fight!
As gallant battle steeds my thoughts are fretting,
Resplendent, my soul's oriflamme gleams bright.
Thy lance now take
For honor's sake; —
Thy seat keep firm in saddle,— not one tremor!

Benignant God,— on thy gold heavenly throne,
This voice of mine extols thy grace and power; —
'Fore thee, most holy Virgin and thy Son,
My heart lies prostrate in this fateful hour.
My every shame
Absolve from blame,
And in thy grace and service keep me long.

The constellations move in fixéd courses,
The tempests lord it over sea and land,—
The buds unfold, a thousand wondrous forces
On every side denote the Eternal's hand.
O that my soul,
God's shining goal
Attained, his mysteries may understand!

Short lived is man upon this verdant planet,
Of time he graspeth but a wave's brief gleam; —
His mansion builds he, round his hearthstone gathers,
And spends his life wrapped in a feverish dream.
When fled his soul,
The ages roll
Above his tombstone their eternal current.

To strife and battle, to defeat or victory,
We all are destined from our natal light; —
What lies thy strength beyond, thou must not covet,
Thy hope will fail, despair thy soul affright.
But one may win
The laureled ring,—
If fall I must, I'll fall in shock of battle.

The richest jewel on Earth, my soul attracting,
Is honor bright, unsullied knightly fame; —
In desperate fights my shining helm has glistened,
On my good sword rests firm my well known name.
Before my foe
No fear I'll show,
Until before God's throne my soul lies prostrate.

With due courtly obeisance, backward stepping,
Returned quite slowly, and with quiet bearing,
His station to the noble minstrel, Wolfram.
His song which he set off with stringéd music,
Sonorous rolling forth in marrowy verses,
Responsive found the heart of every hearer; —
The hall throughout it hurtled like a wind gust,
Which through the forest in the autumn courses.
A muffled whisp'ring started in the distance,
Perceptibly increased, then gradua. died out; —
And once again oppressive silence settled

On all the throng, and every eye was centred
The knight upon, who now surpass must Wolfram.
The Landgrave nodded now; — Tannhäuser started,
Almost beside himself, to leave his station,
And with the glow of strife in all his bearing
With proud obeisance strode he to the arena,
Where lately stood his rival foe in person.
With scornful glance he tossed his waving ringlets
And off his shoulders backward threw his mantle,
Free scope his arms to give for every movement.
With rapid touch Tannhäuser swept the lyre
In lengthy trenchant vibrant joyous prelude,—
And finally dashed in with high pitched tenor,
Which gathered strength as it poured forth in triumph.
Thus ran his song: —

I know a rosebush wondrous fair,—
No one can find it, passing there,
And not its summer bloom perceive.
When modest ope its rosebuds bright
In the dew-besprinkled purple light,
Their brilliance you would scarce believe.
Who sees full blown the dazzling sight
Is almost driven to madness; —
As to the day succumbs the night,
He yields to her victorious might
As 'twere her right,
Adoring her with gladness.

2.

She looks on woman and looks on man,
And brings them all beneath her ban; —
With roguish eyes this empress enters in us.

She spins and weaves among mankind,
Is domiciled in every mind,—
Childlike and bland is gracious goddess Venus,
To all the earth she extends her boon,
And comes with pleasant greeting: —
With her allied are sun and moon
And always sing their impassioned tune
In lied or rune
All rosy lips when meeting.

3.

In every hut she enters in,
Entrancing as the poor man's dream,—
To warm against her downy breast
Permits sleepers on hardest stone,
And leaves them not in deserts alone;
Ah! her dear arms bring soothing rest.
Each brow she cools with fanning wings,
To passion's feverish thirst she brings
A draught from her clear fountain,—
Which sweeter is than spicéd wine,
And quite divine
Entrances all with rapture.

4.

O woman's love,— thou fiery flood!
O woman's charm,— thou sweet rosebud!
Ye raise my courage heaven-high.
Obeying the dictates of my heart
With gleam of sword and minstrel art
For ye I will the world defy.

My belovéd harp I will never cast
Aside in some dark corner,—
And should I shipwrecked be at last,
And storms destroy my helm and mast,
I would still stand fast
Love's devotee and minstrel.

As the ocean breaker on the seashore rushes,
And spray and foam along the sand-beach dashes
And, backward rolling, quick is lost to sight,—
So rustled through the hall intense commotion,
Which almost to acclaimed approval rose,—
Then, more and more subdued, again subsided,
Until had died away the faintest whispers.
The while he sang, Henry von Ofterdingen
His gaze had mostly bent on Irmengard,
While she to look about felt sore affrighted;—
But now, since ended were his dazzling verses,
Her eyes she raised in tender salutation,—
Then filled with hope and flushed with modest blushes
And unperceived, she nodded to the singer
So dear to her,— while on his conscious visage
A haughty smile around his lips was playing.
Wolfram but slightly motioned with his head,—
Then after some brief thought resumed the contest,
But echoed almost tame his pious verses.

Through many lands I rode in vain
And asked ; — where dwells contentment?
I journeyed over hill and plain
In summer's sun and winter's rain,
And nowhere found its dwelling.

I sought for it in coat of mail,
Spurred up my sluggish war-horse,—
Nor friend nor foe could lift the veil
But everywhere were strife and wail,
'Mong thorns and flowers also.

And many paths led here and there,
But none knew where they led to,—
Thou thinkest shining wreaths to wear,
But peace of mind thou ne'er canst share
Through criminal deception.

Passion begets raging desire
With hot and feverish lusting,
Which in thy bosom burns like fire;—
The glamour fled, remorse stings dire,
As serpents woman's bosom.

Self seeking man, take note herein,
That in thy present brief existence,—
Of happiness the Heavenly spring
No angel hosts to thee can bring,—
Thou must thyself deserve it.

To reverent minds, which know no fear,
Heaven's peace alone is given,—
Which shines as stars illume Earth's sphere,
And nothing more desireth here
Save God's celestial pleasures.

Silence ensued, without the faintest token
By which the effect to judge of Wolfram's verses.
In sooth amazed the minstrels seemed, as if
They asked;— "Is Wolfram with his rival playing,
And cozening him with hope of easy vict'ry,

And for the final coup his force reserving?"
Irmgard, confused, groped for the Duchess' hand
And 'neath her mantle hidden finding it
And gently pressing, low and trembling whispered;
"I have great hopes:" then high her glance directing,
Escaped her lips a heartfelt prayerful sigh;—
"Now give him strength, all powerful in Heaven!"
With Vogelweide now exchanged the Landgrave
A single glance,—they understood each other,—
Right construing the deep repose of Wolfram
As the awful pause before the gathering tempest.
But no one there had more than faint suspicion
Of what in mighty Wolfram's soul was seething.
Confidence overweening showed Tannhäuser,
Encouraged by his rival's gloomy bearing;—
And as the lazy bull in the arena
With lance is pricked when doggedly he lingers,
To anger Wolfram purposed Ofterdingen.
Audacious he advanced with fiery glances,
And smote the quivering strings with rash defiance.

1

Even if Venus brings languishing pain,
Brings she too ravishing pleasures,—
Seducing and flushed with love's glow, she is fain
To promise her coveted raptures.
Sweet as the dewy flowery meadows
With my belovéd dreamily toy,
Such is my pleasure and measureless joy.

2

Cowards may lazily take their ease,
Despair may seize on all weaklings,—
Exultantly sing I will as I please
And mock at thyself and thy piety.

With fiery emotion comes from the Ocean
Breathing and heaving a beautiful form, —
Woman's slave I am, in sunshine or storm.

3.

The secrets of all are unveiled to my sight,
Heart to heart passionate speaking, —
When in one rapturous bound of delight
Wishes and feelings commingle.
Secrets confideth, ardent embraceth
One soul its fellow soul, freed from its chains,
Only through mutual pleasures and pains.

4.

To woman and pleasure my song is addressed,
These will I never cease praising, —
That safe to love's rapturous haven of rest
My free aspirations may bear me.
Knowest thou other sweeter life's pleasures?
Alone in the darkness thou hidest thy pain,
By envy tormented; — thou chidest in vain.

Among the hearers ruled divided judgments
In that vast hall; and many hearts were beating,
Impelled by passion, in the singer's favor, —
And many a feminine eye met his responsive,
While his audacious roamed, the assemblage eyeing.
There still prevailed a low continuous murmur, —
For in the contest entered all the audience,
As if their own concerns were being argued.
The Landgrave, sad, preserved a solemn silence,
The Duchess Sophie tenderly was looking
At Irmengard with anxious terror trembling,

Whose face her bosom's pent up woe betokened.
Among themselves the minstrels hotly whispered;
While many Ofterdingen's song applauded,
His sharp and haughty manner others censured.
Wolfram von Eschenbach sat darkly silent;—
Sometimes appeared involuntary tremors
His countenance to cross,— as if his bosom
By stormiest thoughts were torn and agitated,—
And Walter was obliged to go and tell him
'Twas time again to rise and sing in tourney.
Then he arose and turned upon Tannhäuser
A look expressive of that heartfelt sorrow
With which while yet alive, the truth concealing,
One takes eternal leave of some one fated,
Whose dreadful doom he fain is to dissemble.
The audience shuddered, Wolfram's bearing noting;—
'Twas seen by all, the end was fast approaching.
Tannhäuser deeming Wolfram to him hostile
Defiantly regarded his antagonist,
Who now advancing stood, the crescent endwise,
In scornful pride,— indignant swept his harp,—
And sang majestic:—

The tall oak groans and quivers
When e'er the tempest rocks,—
The soul of mankind shivers
When at its gates irresolution knocks.
As lightning's flash my song shall now astound thee,
I will confound thee
And cast, in place of dew, hell-fire around thee.

Not to high Heaven above
Thy impotence aspires,—
Like vapor is thy love,
Which vanishes beneath the Sun's bright fires.

To lift thy eyes to yon effulgent Heaven
Thou dar'st not even,—
Mark well where leads the sensual life thou'rt living.

Love's hallowed dream bestows
Pure happiness on mortals,—
Let no one dare oppose,
Nor sacrilegiously profane its portals.
To Heaven above can mount our aspiration;
With self negation
Each heart its twin should greet, not self laudation.

Never can fierce unrest
Creative power beget,—
They clash within the breast
As hostile stars in deadly conflict met.
To Hell conducteth thy unbridled pleasure,—
Thou mak'st thy treasure
Of dust,— thine eyes not lifting to God's azure.

Forget life's real aim
And all hast thou neglected,—
Hollow thy knightly fame,
Thy air castle too high hast thou erected.
Collapsing falls thy bridge and scheming,
Thy baseless dreaming,—
And all thy rosy hopes are empty seeming.

When the end has come at last,
And death to thee is neighbor,—
When thou hast almost passed
To Eternity,— what fruit of all thy labor?
Thy life was sinful,— leading to perdition,—
In vain contrition;—
Too late to live anew thy earthly mission.

Thus masterfully had the pious Wolfram
As yet not sung, nor made such deep impression
The solemn tones of his transcendent voice.
While listening Wolfram's song, grew pale and paler
Tannhäuser's countenance, and on its ceasing
With vacant look he rose and left his seat.
"The wager I have lost,"— he whispered, tottering
The daïs to where sat the Count enthronéd,—
Then on the broad steps kneeling down exclaimed;—
"Wolfram has won,— give him the Crown of Life!"
And on his harp then leaned his head in silence,
Inert and dazed upon his knees remaining.
Silence funereal hushed that vast assemblage,—
To breathe aloud none ventured,—consternation
Upon all countenances plain was pictured.
Before all eyes the tournament was ended;—
Tannhäuser, vanquished, to the axe had yielded.
The Landgrave, pallid, gazed upon the singer
Who had resigned the contest, while the Duchess
Erect sat up, with one hand firmly grasping
The settle's cushioned back, and with the other
Irmgard, distracted, by her shoulder holding,—
From rash and unwise action to restrain her.
As sculpt from marble stood victorious Wolfram.
Herman then rose and after hesitation
— The golden chaplet from its cushion lifting
And carrying it,— the steps descended slowly.
But as he passed one side of Ofterdingen,
The latter raised his head with languid motion
As one entranced, whose spirit was far absent,
And Hermann, then approaching Wolfram, noticed.
As walking in his sleep then rose Tannhäuser,
And dreamily,— as one by sense deserted
And of his actions totally unconscious,—

Ghostlike his harp he clutched with bloodless fingers
And made the strings to vibrate slowly, slowly;
As from the spirit world weird sounds forth issued.
While thus he stood near Eschenbach and Hermann,
— Now on the point of giving and receiving,—
These turned, with deep amazement him regarding.
His eyes gleamed with a radiance quite unearthly,
Impressing all as heavenly and godlike;—
His face enkindled and his lofty forehead
With inspiration glowed, as now the measure
Louder rang forth; — at length he broke his silence,
And as the golden crown touched Wolfram's hands,
Again burst forth his voice in strains celestial:

Came swimming o'er the blue waves, alone his way upon,
From Palestine arriving, a royal lineaged swan,—
For word had lately reached him of an eagle's lofty flight,
And he had crossed the ocean to surpass that eagle's might.

To the air they flung their pinions with the earliest morning's breath,
Each other bent to vanquish, the stake was life and death,—
They circled high and higher, alternate each surpassed,
But on his daring journey the swan fell lame at last.

Before his courage failed him, before lying down to die,
He spoke to the beholders, "Now hear my last swan-cry!
Ye dare not now forbid me, my song will soon be ended"—
They listened to his pleading, and thus the swan lamented.

Farewell, ye purest breezes, thou deep unquiet sea,
Ye pleasant garden perfumes, and ye, my spear and shield —
My neighing battle charger, my harp's rich melody,
Thou bright and trusty falchion! To fate I now must yield.

For one alone it grieves me to quit my station here,
To her I send, departing, my last farewell and kiss —
To every wind I say it — above all others dear,
She has held my heart from childhood ; — to die near her, what bliss !

Once more I thought to accomplish a lofty flight this day,
But now am sore repentant I bare myself so proud —
Ah ! could I only speak out, what now my heart would say !
But death comes in between us with its funereal shroud.

Plant only on my hillock one rose compassionate,
Queen Minne wove my white-wings, Queen Honor helped thereby ; —
I'm ready now for headsman, I ask no better fate,
Farewell ! beloved Earth-life ! Ah ! thou mak'st it hard to die.

Then 'mong the minstrels and the assembled people
Broke out a weeping and a smothered sobbing,—
The Landgrave sternly pressed his lips together,
While stormily heaved Wolfram's breast tumultuous.
To his rival quick he strode, the chaplet proffering,
And said ; — "Take thou the crown ! I give it thee !
Within thy song lies dormant, undeveloped,
Immortal gifts ; — then live, and use them wisely,—
And many other prizes shall be thine."
With haughty bearing backward drew Tannhäuser,—
"And owe my life to mercy ? — Never ! — No ! "
"But spurnest thou my love then, Ofterdingen ? "
At that fell on the floor two harps, re-echoing,—
And in each other's arms impetuous rushing,
Stood locked in fast embrace the rival minstrels.

And now set in unending acclamation,—
The harps gave forth wild notes of exultation,—
With thankful heart the Graf looked up to Heaven,
And Irmgard wept upon the Duchess' bosom.

IX

EXALTED LOVE

The summer now was gay with flowers,
Bestowing various delights,—
Its cooling winds and thunder showers
Its sunny days and dewy nights.
Upon the branches fruits were ripening,
The smiling fields in sunshine lay,—
The golden grain was now inviting
The reaper's hook and harvest day.
In one man's breast a seed had germined
And grown to full maturity,
And now at length was he determined
The issue of his suit to try.
No further barrier saw Tannhäuser
Opposing his unspoken love,
And though at times inclined to waver
Firmly he strode with fixed resolve.
The duel he had fought out fairly,
And if the prize in sight of all
Had not been placed by Fortune squarely
His brow upon in the audience hall,

Yet no one spoke of him as second,—
Withdrawing of his own accord;
And if at times he, brooding, reckoned
As premature his own award,
Because still testified against him,
As nothing else could e'er have done,
His unconditional surrender
Witnessed by his belovéd one,—
He yet was notably embolden,
Reflecting with a joyous heart
To him was given the chaplet golden
By his great rival Eschenbach.
His self reliance, lately shattered,
Had mainly to him now returned;—
While eager hope his fancy flattered,
Expectantly his passion burned
The Landgrave was his firm supporter,
His sure and trusty friend remained,—
Yes,—since that fateful day was over
Tannhäuser in his grace had gained.
The minstrels too were more devoted
Since that event, and better still,
The earnest spiritual Wolfram
His friendship sought with right good will.
Once more his days were filled with pleasure,
His confidence made all seem bright,—
On wide spread pinions to the azure
Aloft he soared in the morning light.
Beloved and honored in his station,
At princes' boards a welcome guest,
His fame repeated through the nation,
His master skill by all confessed.—
Now in the prime of his existence
He stood in all his manhood's strength,

That time when reigns by sheer persistence
Man's domineering will at length.
Near him Tannhäuser saw no rival;
Vain-glorious asked his boastful heart
To what emprise was he unequal,
What barrier to his wishes' path?
And now he coveted but one thing,
The goal to reach so long deferred, —
Irmgard's possession still was wanting
And that depended on one word.
As sure he felt as of existence
That he was loved by Irmengard,
And she would yield to his persistence
The moment he his thoughts unbarred.
  In Irmengard's embraces folded,
His ringlets stirred by her sweet breath,
On seas of ecstasies he floated
Nor conscious was of touching Earth.
Revealed in Irmgard and incarnate
He saw the long desired prize,—
With soul and glorious beauty animate,
Psyche herself in human guise.
Playing himself the role of Cupid
Irmgard's deliverer to appear,—
Their mutual love to bind he hopéd
From previous ill fate rescuing her.
  Of all the sex who had enmeshed him
Not one had bound him in the past,
But now was found the coveted blessing
Among Earth's denizens at last.
The cheap rewards of gallantry
Had never brought delight Elysian,
Of Love's imperial sovereignty
With Irmgard he would make division.

Glowing with huge anticipation,
The past forgot which was afar,
Filled full with fanciful elation,
He trusted in his guiding star.

And Irmgard also, all on fire,
Her absent friend was musing o'er,—
For now her love was surging higher,
Most like the breakers on the shore.
She saw him as on that day kneeling
When he had almost lost his life,
But he had issued, although yielding,
A greater hero from the strife.
His voice's tone, her self love flatt'ring,
At times within her ears still rang,—
Recalling how in heart-felt accents
The joy of mutual love he sang.
Then Wolfram's warning voice affrighted,
As 't were the trump of judgment day,—
When he in language stern, decided,
Denounced the guilt of passion's sway.
And as the singers had contended
For life and death with grim intent,
So Irmgard felt in her were blended
Two opposing forces, each one bent
On triumphing the other over,
Direct appealing to her heart,—
While 'mid the conflict brooded o'er her
The Duchess' words,—"A wife thou art!"
Afraid to meet again her lover
Was Irmengard, for well she guessed
That now well known were to that other
The mixed emotions of her breast.

No longer was there any mystery,
Nor was kind Fate's decree concealed
That after all their long anxiety
To each a new life was revealed.
While dancing, the grand contest after,
With rapid foot love had advanced,
And filled with new-born passion's glamour
Their speaking eyes held them entranced.
When next he came, his passion urging,
How could she look him in the face?
"Please God in Heaven, on me have mercy; —
His will to oppose lend me thy grace!"

He came and prouder, more unbended,
Was never emperor on his throne,—
No demigod from Heaven descended
Was ever more imperious grown
Than was Tannhäuser now arrivéd
On wings of hope exultant buoyed,—
And scarce his stirrup had he quitted
Before near Irmengard he stood.
She sat in her secluded parlor,
So long for hidden love a cage,—
No envious spies could follow after,
Fit spot for arguing passion's page.
When Irmengard with cheeks on fire
Near her beheld the princely man,
Her apprehension rose still higher
As instantaneous he began.
"In thy demeanor I read plainly
Thy question,— what my mission now; —
Irmgard! — No more dissembling vainly,
It rends my heart and clouds my brow.
One eager word of ardent longing
My burning lips must now confess,

As in the early gray of morning
The sun breaks through,— dost thou not guess?"
"Friend! Let the word remain unspoken,
Keep fast imprisoned in thy mind
Thy burden with its seal unbroken,
And absolution that way find!"
No, Irmengard!"
"My cruel anxiety
No longer I'll suffer,
One venturesome question
Now asketh thy lover;
So look at me boldly, speak! art thou mine?
As quick as a heartbeat,— say, I am thine!

Yes, to possess thee
Is my heart's craving,
To cradle and press thee
Ardent embracing.
Rush on my breast then, impetuous now!
Consuming as fire is passion's wild glow.

If thou art only
Tender and willing,
Then shalt thou float on
Pleasures Elysian.
Linger not, think not my suit to deny,
Keen as the whirlwind is love's piercing eye!"

Meanwhile their eyes encountered often,
And giddy with excess of love
Within his arms she lay enfolden,
What he had sung scarce conscious of.
As if enwrapped in visions airy
And to some spot celestial borne,
To sense quite lost in dreamland fairy,
Entranced reposed her lovely form.

Fatigued by his impetuous kisses
But ravished too, she hid her face,
Exchanging mutual love caresses,
Together clasped in close embrace.
While crystal tears her cheeks bedewéd
She said; — "Thou for whose love I yearn!
How sweet it is,— I never knew it,—
To love and be beloved in turn!"
He answered,— "Dearest, fondest Passion,
'Tis only on thy breast I wish,"
But quick as bolt of lightning flashing
His mouth she closed with a clinging kiss.
Again to speak commenced her caller,
But from her head came tumbling down
Her tortoise comb, thus letting fall her
Luxuriant ringlets o'er her gown.
And now the loveliest mass of tresses
In loose disorder was revealed,
Her long thick hair like golden cresses
Her lissome form almost concealed.
A roguish glance at him she ventures
The while he smoothed it in his hands,—
"Whoever binds me with such fetters
Can surely keep me in her bands,"
He laughed; — and then in mood provoking
She tossed about her floating hair,—
Which, covering as with mantle woven,
Almost concealed the high born pair.
And while to him she thus was clinging,
Awaking tenderness anew,
Her head against his shoulder flinging,
With gentle pressure then he drew
Her close and closer, smoothing gently
Her loose and wavy locks of hair,—

And whispered softly, very softly
A secret question in her ear.
  The words aroused her from her dreaming,—
'T was manifest to her thenceforth
That negligently she was nearing
The perilous brink of broken troth.
O'erwhelmed with sadness and contrition
That from her friend she had not tried
To hide her own heart's true condition,
With ashy cheeks she quick replied: —
  "I must not scold because I share it,
Forgive my fealty's transient stain,—
The fault was mine, 't is I must bear it,
But we must never meet again."
  "Irmgard! thou hesitatest? waverest?
Thou lovest me and wilt not bend?
Shall this first moment of our happiness
Be also its last bitter end?
  "I waver not nor bend, undaunted;
Thou askest wickedness of me,—
Thy wishes never shall be granted,
Too much, too much, I have given thee."
  "Irmgard, my tuneful inspiration!
Thou art always present in my soul,
And pedestaled on expectation,
Thou art my being's only goal!
The planets nor above nor under
Has ever dawned love like to mine!
When in the day of final judgment
Is weighed my 'whelmimg love and thine.
Thou wilt have been the best belovéd
Of all the creatures of this Earth
Aforetime brought forth and entombéd,
Since first befell creation's birth.

Yes! — turn on me thy speaking glances,
Confessing thou art wholly mine,—
Freely drink in with all thy senses
My jubilant words; — 'Entirely thine!'
There is no simple nerve or artery
Nor fitful impulse of my brain
Which doth not cling to thee and clasp thee,
As traverse light and sound the main.
Our words are tinkling cymbals only,
And came they thundrous from thy lips
My ardent love would yet enfold thee,
As mighty Ocean cradles ships.
And thou? No need have I to ask thee
What 't is which in thy soul makes moan,—
I know it by thy quickened heart-beats,
As rested 'gainst my breast thy own.
Irmgard! thou lov'st me,— all the passion,
The overpowering wishfulness
Which in my soul is seething, flashing,
Thy own impassioned looks confess.
What then prevents us from enjoying
What passion bids and love ordains,—
From mingling in one single torrent,
To music of Aeolian strains?
Could I, as balm of rose, enfold thee,—
As whispering reed, implore thy grace,
As gladsome breezes, play around thee,—
As moonlight doth, thy form embrace!
Ah! with the intoxicating pleasure
Of magic thee would I enchain,
And pearl-like in thy pathway scatter
Beseeching words in suppliant vein.
Irmgard! as spacious Heaven greets thee
So streams my love to thee alone,—

And supplicating humbly meets thee,
Entreating only; "Be my own!"
My dearest friend! 'T is useless pleading,
Grief measureless thou bringst to me,—
The gates are barred to Hymen leading,
Remains no choice to me and thee.
While living I will always love thee
But not to the point of deadly sin,
Since destiny and sacred honor
Our separate paths have come between.
Our hearts may ever stay united,
My own is thine in spite of ban,—
To yield forbids my honor plighted,
The deep abyss no bridge can span."
"And has thy love such narrow limits,
Is it so puny and so weak
That all thy thoughts and ardent wishes
Beneath the shelter refuge seek
Of plighted troth, and flinch before it
Abjectly crying,— "What a sin!—?
Lost happiness,— who fears restore it
Must not expect love's joys to win.
Irmgard! By these thy tear-drops falling,
Which my wild words have drawn from thee,—
Let not my aspirations welling
Be lost in blank eternity!
'T is only thee they clinging rest on,
And if thou speak'st inflexibly
Thou mayest repent thee for thy lost one,—
Thou know'st not where thou drivest me.
Bethink thee! what thou dost withhold me
Is the only thing I crave on Earth;—
If thou denyest I will boldly
Women renounce of mortal birth.

Must I but dream of perfect happiness?
Never enjoy its plenteous flow?
By blood! I'll track it in its fastness,
It matters not, above, below!
I will compell it, will possess it,
Until I have reached my coveted goal,—
My purpose 't is, I now confess it,
To fathom woman's love and soul.
With passion's flame will I entice thee,
Which in my breast lies smouldering now,—
My own delight will ne'er suffice me,
'T is thy emotions I must know!"

"'T is lust thou seekest, rude and ruder!
The idol of thy heart's desire
Is carnal beauty,— rash intruder
Where dwelleth love's all-hallowed fire!
What thou to me of late confessedst,—
By gnawing passion constant plagued,
From one to another turning ceaseless,
By its accursed embrace enslaved,—
And now to me hast twice repeated,
At that time thou didst leave unsaid
As for a sister's ears unsuited,
But now thou hast spoken, passion led.
'T is this which now must separate us,
And if unplighted were my troth,—
Whatever fortune may await us,
The impossible grant true love may not."

Tannhäuser stood with heart sore stricken,
Scarce realizing where he was,—
His hopes and all his happiness seeing
In ruins dashed, and lost his cause;
But quick broke out in scornful fashion,
The blows defying of adverse fate,—

As again impelled by raging passion
Proudly erect he stood, elate: —
"'T is all in vain thy futile struggle,
Though angels guard thy every hour
I will master thee with magic subtle,—
On my side fights the mightier power.
Know then that from yon mountain sinister
A goddess is regarding us,—
Her promise is my wishes' minister,
'T is she spurs on my passions thus.
Queen Venus' self was my godmother,
My life she dowered with magic charms,—
'T is she has given me many another,
'T is she that gives thee to my arms!"
Upsprang Irmgard with mien defiant,
With outstretched arms she watchful stood,—
'Gainst contact guarding, self-reliant,
And muttered some inaudible word.
Then queenly, dignified and wary,
She strode and looked him full in eye,—
Invincible as mailed Valkyrie,
And spoke with scornful majesty: —
"In league thou art with powers supernal?
The goddess Venus is thy trust?
Some demon rules thy soul infernal,
'T is such makes thee a slave to lust!
And darest still with such alliance
Upon this bright Earth to remain?
Polluting with thy rash defiance
The crystal air, Heaven's gift to man?
Depart! Depart from Irmgard's threshold,
So cursed by thy unworthy steps!
'T is yonder thou wilt find thy level,
Bewitched by devils' arts and tricks!"

Tannhäuser caught his breath in snatches
With frame convulsed and passion-marred,
And clenching close his fists he gnashes,—
"Thou wilt drive me crazy, Irmengard!"
But quick he managed to recover,
Though showing pique in every tone,—
Then slow replying said her lover:
"*De vo benie!* I will be gone;
And firm resolved thus from my sandal
Shake off this day's besmirching dust,
And haste, enwrapped in night's dark mantle,
Against a goddess's breast to rest.
Some day thy friend thou wilt remember
Who never can return to thee,
But with the warp of thy existence
His fate has woven eternally."
To go he turned, but him recalling,
Upon his neck herself she threw,—
His aid without she would have fallen,
Heart-broken, wounded death unto.
"Confess thou art not in earnest, Henry!"
Thus Irmgard spoke,—"Forbids it Fate!
She will not dare to greet with welcome
My romping girlhood's cherished mate.
I tell thee, No! Forsake thou canst not
Thy grand career, shield, verse and ode!
Henry! by the Redeemer's agony
Tread not that God-defiant road!"
"Let go! of what avail my tarrying?
The gulf between us is too wide,
Thou hast a limit to thy passion
While mine is boundless as the tide!"
"And hast thou failed to comprehend then
This 'whelming love which for thee lives,

That Irmgard's fate with thine is blenden,
That all her heart to thee she gives?"
"Art mine at length? Ah! wings of angels
Are bringing comfort to my soul,—
Irmgard! thy assenting smile so gracious
My stricken heart will quick make whole.
I knew it well and now 't is settled,
My part has ta'en Venus divine,—
And to her will has now compelled thee,
So speak it out and say thou art mine!"
She back recoiled, the worst forboding,
As if some fiend her scorn awoke,—
And quick replied with bitter loathing,—
"Never! my mother's soul I invoke!"
"Ha ha! Irmgard! Ha ha! Art weeping?
Sweetheart, be gay! send merry greeting!
By thy own mother's soul hast sworn?
I had a mother,— from me torn;—
A dream she had,— ha ha! a dream!
Say not 't was but a vision's gleam!
First lisped the voice, then cried divine—
"Forever will his heart be mine!"
Irmgard! Salvation is at stake!
Thou art driving me from Christian faith;
The path I know,— I will bravely tread it,—
Through flame I will pass to my confederate;
But from this time henceforward thou
One moment's joy wilt never know.
Art fearful and avoidest me?
My parting steps dost fear to see?
Ah,— I have loved thee first and best!
Thou hast stolen my rest
Too much of late,
Oh thou, my heart's old Easter mate!

The treacherous woman,
Who loveth no man
And deceives with a kiss,
May lightning hurl in the abyss!!
  In the evening-red a rider rode
And left his love in sorrow bowed;—
Ah! you wish me to go?
Need'st not entreat,— 't is my will so!
  With the queen of all women
Aflame with loving,
Whose ravishing form
On a mother's breast was never borne,
With her I will dally 'mid roses and lillies
And deluge with kisses.
  Thou joy of my heart! Thou goal of my dream!
Thou image celestial! Let me in! Let me in!
O Venus! the gate of thy mansion unfasten!
Thy lover cometh to thee now!
Possessed of thy enchanted pass-word
The love I crave thou canst bestow!
  Ha there! Look there!— She comes, me seeking
With beauteous heart-compelling mien!
Her eyes twin stars,— her bosom heaving,—
I am coming, Venus,— Pleasure's Queen!!"

  Tannhäuser went as he had threatened,
With vacant look and failing wits;—
And Irmgard, anguished, knelt disheartened
Before an image of the Christ.

X

THE HÖRSELBERG

'T is twilight, sultry is the air,—
No cool refreshing balmy breeze
The foliage stirs among the trees,
From Heaven's dome looks down no star; —
The murky clouds in masses brood,
And darkly lower o'er the wood,—
The birds are dumb, no beetle whirrs,
No living thing the forest stirs,—
The roots are asleep, the twigs are dreaming,
Creation pervades a death-like seeming.
Now clatters the tread of a galloping steed,
While a direful cry through the night rings dread;—
"Huzzah! Speed on! with scorn for the past!
Who trusts to his hopes is betrayed at last!"
As hail storms tempestuous beat on the earth
Rides a furious shape in the gloom of the night; —
"Huzzah! Yet faster, my steed! 'Tis worth: —
To my languishing love in her palace so bright!"
Hark! Listen that clatter and snorting and clack,
How the sounds from the mountains come echoing back;

"Hurrah, my heart! Hell's flame and flood
Shall overcome thy raging blood!"
Beflect with foam the courser flies,—
Seem dancing magic rounds the trees.
Tannhäuser 't is;— at a breakneck pace
'Mid showers of sparks he gallops along,—
His steed he urges merciless
And forces his way over stick and stone,
Over road and bridge at a furious rate,—
One single thought torments his brain;—
"To the Hörselberg! Through its gloomy gate,
Though hell itself should intervene!"
The groaning earth makes rustle the grass,
Listening the hoofs the fox lies fast,—
On his perch the owl whoops loud and shrill,
And now the knight has gained the hill
And quit the vale, with bridle streaming
Thrown loose on the neck of his stallion steaming,—
And in the gloom is threading the maze
By the flickering light of the twilight haze.
The Hörselberg, distinct outlined,
Against the sky looms sharp defined,—
Its platformed ridge extending back
In shape of a huge sarcophagus
All covered in and draped with black,
But never yet committed to dust,—
In its dismal bulk affording room
For millions dead to rest in its womb.
At the mountain's foot the knight draws rein,
Dismounts and quick turns loose again
His equine friend:— "Return my steed,—
Thy stall thou wilt reach without my aid!"
The horse trots off 'thout spur or goad,
For well he knows the Eisnach road.

With hasty strides through a deep ravine
Tannhäuser pursues his toilsome way,
And presses on with impetuous mien
Through briar and bush as best he may ; —
All barriers to his path above
Pushing aside with fixed resolve,
And struggling toward his coveted goal
He forces up the ill-famed mole.
At length upon the ridge he stands,
As bare and bleak as Ocean's strands,—
Nor trees nor blade of grass grow there,
No flowers perfume the heavy air,
But parched up weeds and lichens and moss
From the sand peep forth, and withered gorse.
The wind on the crest of the ridge passing nigh
Is buzzing and whisp'ring and skimming by,—
Like wandering ghosts which all unseen
Emerge and glide through the churchyard green
Himself a restless wandering ghost,
Tannhäuser circles, almost lost,—
And with staggering gait is groping around,
In hopes to discover the path under ground.
Blue flames illumine the murky night
With flickering and uncertain light,
And 'mong the rocks so dance and beam
He scarce can follow their transient gleam,—
But just as they suddenly vanish in air,
A yawning chasm confronts him there.
"Here lies the path,— this brooklet laves
The enchanted mountain's rocky caves,—
But hush ! Those sounds ? Who sings so sweet?"
Ceases almost his heart to beat ; —
"Advance ? — Retreat ? — Why this delay ?
Irresolute ?— Begone dismay ! "

'T is a most forbidding desolate place,
Wind-swept by the storm which gathers apace; —
A form stands there at the mouth of the cave,
Dost not perceive its garments wave?
And now with its arms it motions away,
While a hollow voice is heard to say; —
"The riotous crew of Holda avoid, —
No return there is from her abode!"
Tannhäuser's blood almost congeals,
But toward the hoary form he reels
And nothing finds, — the spook is flown,
Again he is groping all alone; —
'T was the howling wind which had startled him,
His shadow 't was near the cave he had seen; —
The mass of clouds is broken and reft,
And slight obscured the pale moonlight
The barren ridge illumines bright,
But increases the gloom of the cavernous cleft.
Now tumbles and rumbles the storm at its height,
Makes tremble the mountain as if with affright; —
It scatters the gravel and stones all about,
Then surges and wrestles in furious rout, —
Uprooting the furze and ploughing the land,
And drifting in winrows the eddying sand, —
And thundrously raging and shrieking and rending
As if it were bent on the Earth dismemb'ring, —
And on riving the rocks to penetrate through them,
As whirlwinds 'mong bushes and brambles disporting.
Tannhäuser stands there bolt upright,
Most like an oak, deep rooted, tall;
Though bends the top to the tempest's might,
The solid trunk will never fall.
No threatening words he hears, nor greeting,
Already his heart is with Holda below, —

And spite of tempest on him beating,
He wavers not, come friend or foe.
"How gloomy the path, if any there be!
How massive the bolts that hamper me!
In spite of this funereal chill,
Return or not, descend I will!
Make way! whatever yon threshold bars,
Whatever reptiles crawl or sting!
If never again I may see the stars,
In Holda's realm I will be a king."
His sword he sudden draws with might,
Resolved his way to force or fight,
And disappears in the gloomy night.

The hours are spinning man's fanciful dreams,
And with diligent hands from morn to night
Are weaving and working the finishing seams,—
By night and by day recording time's flight.
His unspoken secrets they hide from the light
With a covering veil of enveloping gauze,—
Which one day is sombre with clouds black as night
And next day is 'broidered with glittering stars.
What mortal holdeth one day in his hand?
Who knoweth where yesterday vanished? now is?
Who graspeth tomorrow with magical wand?
Who hopeth and feareth not Fate's decrees?
One evil jumps, another crawls,—
And though kind breezes fill the sails,
Goes down the ship when comes the storm,—
For worms have eaten the planking strong; —
While never-halting time flows on,
Its goal unto resistless borne,—

And with it carries every thought,
Man's words and works and all he has wrought.
  The passing days and hours with strife
Are filled, and woeful crimes appal,—
Fatality enters every life
And direful compasses great and small;
Both small and great by chance are controlled,
From man's career to the starry world;—
Our fates depend on mysterious voices,
And Heaven laments, while Hell rejoices.

  At last the dawning day is illuming
The Hörselberg with golden rays,—
Afar is heard hoarse thunder's booming,
While round its crest the sunshine plays.
  The chasm outside Tannhäuser springs,
With pains are racked his fevered limbs,—
His brow is hot, his temples throb,
And boiling in his veins his blood,—
By a burning thirst he is sore distressed,
Where last with cooling drink was he blessed?
  And now in amaze he surveys the scene;—
"Where am I then? Where have I been?
Great God in Heaven! with that female Satan
And savage dwarfs, at their revels wanton!
With Venus I've dwelt, played the lover in Hell,—
To her I have prayed! Salvation's knell!
  But is it true? Is it not a dream?
How long in that curséd spot have I been?"
One night was it, or seven years?
His hands he wrings, his hair he tears,
Intent he listens and peers around,
The gruesome cave sends forth no sound,—

He only hears the water dropping,
His own heart-beats' tumultuous knocking; —
On his knees he sinks,— forever, ever,
Is forfeited his soul's salvation!
He dare not pray the Almighty Giver
Amid that scene of desolation.
  Near the cave he stands with quivering breath,
The Scharfenberg seems dusk as death,—
The Wartburg gleams in the sunshine bright,
Now dispersing the clouds with its flood of light.

  "O Irmengard! O Wolferam!"
He moans, while blinding teardrops stream,—
Then tottering down the mountain's side
His inn he reaches, forgot his pride,—
And pays off his host with liberal measure,
And gathers together his goods and his treasure,—
His armor puts on, his stallion saddles,
And afar in the land despondent gallops.

XI

THE PILGRIMAGE

Whither rides he? — Ofterdingen
Had no special destination.
Shelt'ring roofs of honest people
Could he safely venture under?
Would not every house he entered
By his presence be polluted?
On his forehead was't not written
Where he came from,— why he wandered—
And that Christians must avoid him?
Heavy hearted he was riding,
To his stallion leaving guidance
Free from check of bit or bridle.
Anywhere except these mountains,—
Where so many pleasures blossomed,
Where good fortune he had augured,
Where his hopes were dashed in pieces,—
And where finally he had fallen
In the power of Holda's harlots.
As the autumn wind was strewing
In his path the fallen leafage

Lately flowering out and verdant,
— Now dried up and withered, faded —
So he saw his own existence
Prematurely faded, broken,—
Nor was any to remind him
Soon would bloom another Springtime.
  Also on his saddle seated
Was a ghostly spectre, tightly
Clasping him around his body,
— Never quitting — fiendish whisp'ring
Venus' scathing maledictions —
Never letting him forget them.
Frightful to his ears it sounded,—
That prophetic final warning
When his goal he thought achievéd.
Falling from his fancied Heaven
Was as painful and as terrible
As his shameful soul's abasement.
  His experience in that mountain
To no person could he speak of,—
One man only — sooth — excepted;
But where must he go to find him?
This exception was Spervogel,
And Tannhäuser now resolved to
Go in search of his old crony,
— Seeking him throughout the kingdom —
And to him confide his troubles,
Consolation hoping from him.
  On the morrow of the duel
Full instructions he had given
To the stroller, to go forth and
Ascertain if Ritter Scharf'berg
Were alive, or dead and buried; —

So that he might know securely
Whether Irmgard was or was not
Free from wedlock,— the obstruction
'Twixt himself and marriage lying.
  Ah! 't was now of slight importance,—
For, since sinning with that harlot
In the depths of Hörsel Mountain,
To appear in Irmgard's presence
Thenceforth he could never venture.
Even purest thoughts and feelings
— His belovéd friend regarding —
Now seemed wicked, sacrilegious.

  Many highways passed Tannhäuser,
Many towns explored and traversed,
But in vain sought he Spervogel; —
Lastly at Alzey arriving
Where was bred the old man stroller,—
Still no trace of him existed.
Then to Worms on Rhine he journeyed,
Where he final rest accorded
To himself and faithful charger.
  On the farther bank of Rhine Stream
— The grand river street confronting —
Was a celebrated convent,
The Abbey of Lorsch entitled,—
Where the German monarch Ludwig,
In a decorated chapel
Lay at rest in sleep eternal.
  Thither urged him his depression,
For his conscience — day in — day out —
Ever stronger moved Tannhäuser
Unto penance for his sinnings.
So, together with his courser,

Over river he was ferried.
There, upon the river's border,
Down he threw himself, reclining,—
Letting graze his hungry stallion,
Same as many years aforegone
In the Alpine Iron Mountains.
  Those days — Oh, how happy was he,—
On the verdant turfage lying
When monastic robes he cast off,
— As a miller casts its casing —
And the wide world's golden freedom
Promised him a thousand pleasures!
  When from Adamunt he wandered,
— Questing fame and love of woman,—
Nothing else on Earth possessed he
Save his harp and sword and courser.
Now, how different his standing?
With its serpent fangs remorse was
Gnawing, gnawing at his vitals,—
Furies lashed his tortured conscience,
Goaded him with accusations
Always present to his bosom,—
And in sooth his thoughts disquieting
Dared not disregard Tannhäuser,
For before him loomed up frightful,
— Menacing — the future's spectre,
Could he not gain absolution.
  To him holding up a mirror,
Shame pursued him — terrifying
As the stare of a Medusa;—
The once haughty knight compelling,—
— Who esteemed himself so highly
When compared with other mortals —
His affliction to acknowledge.

"Is there then no earthly power,
Which can blot out recollection?"
Thus he moaned, but quite indelibly
Was imprinted his transgression,—
Holding him in iron bondage.
Now that he was but an outcast,
Was he of his knighthood worthy?
Perish all his knight's belongings!
Then he instant took his weapons,
Helmet and equipments various,
Leopold's medallion golden,
Landgrave Hermann's golden chaplet,
His belovéd harp,— long silent —
And the remnants of the booty
Brought from those far Eastern Countries;—
All these and his other treasures
Placing on his shield, he raised all
High aloft,— and furious dashed them
In the river's rapid current.
Foaming, gurgling leapt the water
As they disappeared forever,—
Then the river rolled quiescent
Over the interréd treasures.
"As my treasure,— now let passion
Henceforth — from this very moment —
Be entombed and quite forgotten!"
Cried Tannhäuser,— caught his stallion —
Then rode to the neighboring convent.

First he entered in the chapel,—
Knelt awhile at Ludwig's tombstone,
Then inquired the abbot after.
Very few words had he spoken,
Thus commencing his confession,—

—How the Hörsel he had quitted,
And the embraces of its goddess —
When the abbot interrupted,
Would no longer listen,— saying ; —
" None excepting God's Vice-gerent
From such erring can absolve you,—
Therefor visit Rome as pilgrim,
Kneel before the Holy Father,
Praying him grant absolution ; —
Guilt like thine absolve I cannot."
Then the abbot, to the gateway
Ofterdingen straight conducting,—
Thrust him out the darkness into,
Merciless denying shelter.
Ev'n the horse he would not harbor,
Which had carried Holda's lover,—
But he took him in exchange for
Little money and a capote.
To disguise himself completely
Quick Tannhäuser donned the garment,—
Then commenced his pilgrim journey
— Night above him and within him —
To the eternal city,— Roma.

In the first part of his travels
Came he to a little village
And there met him a young woman,
Sorrowfully him accosting ; —
" Welcome to thee,— pious brother,
Sent in need by Heaven, it seemeth !
Come with me to yonder cabin,
There to shrive a dying person,—
'Tis an agéd honest stroller."

"What? a stroller?"— asked Tannhäuser,—
"Is't the Fiddle King,— Spervogel?"
"Yes, Spervogel! Do you know him?"
"Is he living? — Tell me quickly!"
"Yes, he lives yet — has his senses —
Jolly also,— but he says he
Wants to die,"— replied the woman,
Both then in the cabin entered,
Where Spervogel death awaited.
Quiet lay he, pale and weary,
And his old and honest visage
By a straggling mass of white hair
And a long beard was surrounded.
When the brother monk had entered,
With a look of deep inquiry
Scrutinized him the old stroller.
Then sat down the knight Tannhäuser
By his bedside,— softly asking; —
"Don't you know me,— old companion?"
"Yes, by voice,— but not by garment,"—
Said Spervogel,— while his pale face
Lighted up with gleams of pleasure.
"So you're once more Holy Brother!
Let me see if you are shaven!"
Then he reached to pull the capote
From his old friend's head and shoulders,—
But his strength was insufficient
And Tannhäuser instant doffed it.
"No! I see your cavalier locks
Still adorn your headstrong person; —
All you need to do is listen,
For I know all and I have but
Very little time to hear you."

"Knowest all?" — Tannhäuser queried.
"Yes, I come from Isenache,—
Never resting, have pursued you
Like a dog,— and now 'tis over; —
But somewhat I have to tell you," —
He continued, and made gestures
That the pair — who on him tended —
Should withdraw without the chamber.
It was Winli, the trapezzist,
And the swarthy gipsy, Hazika,
Who had found the agéd stroller.
When Spervogel and Tannhäuser
Were alone,— then spoke the former; —
"Irmengard is long a widow,
And perhaps 't was your good lance thrust
Which her errant spouse transfixéd.
In the Wassenberger conflict
Perished Kurt von Scharfenberge.
Three days only,— three days after
You had run away to Venus
I returned to Scharfenberge
With the tidings; — could not you then
Tarry only three days longer?"
Three days only! — Wretched fortune!
On those three days was depending
Each one's happiness and future.
Ah! how very differently
Had all happened, if to Irmgard
Had not hurried off Tannhäuser!
To pursue such grim reflections
Leads to madness.— Crushed and broken,
Pale and gloomy — vacant gazing —
Sat he there until the stroller
Once more asked him; — "Is't in earnest

You have put on monkish garments
In which you again are muffled?
For in such case once more must I
Out of priestly vestments talk you.
  If a solemn oath now binds you,
At some holy Sanctuary
To obtain full absolution
For your sinning with that phantom,—
Do it quickly; — take a bishop
By the hand, and be not stingy,—
That would never your case answer; —
Absolution he will grant you,—
Then as half a Christian can you
Irmengarde straightway marry.
  Hasten must you, for the widow,—
On the brink of desperation,—
Weeping, wills to abide in cloister
In Saint Nicoläus convent,
Praying for your wretched spirit.
Straight to Irmgard send this Winli
With the message; — "Wait a little
And get ready for a wedding; —
Soon will come your Tann-hussäre."
  Ah! the agéd story teller
Little thought what bitter sorrows
On Tannhäuser he inflicted
With his merry exhortation.
But the pilgrim — not desiring
To disturb the final moments
Of Spervogel with the gnawings
Of his god-forsaken bosom —
Made the effort, and succeeded,
To appear in buoyant spirits,—
As approving of his counsel.

"May turn out so,"— said he smiling,—
"But keep still! — for now I stay here,—
Will not quit you nor your bedside
Until you are convalescent."
"Convalescent? — Buried rather!
Quite outfiddled is this stroller,"—
Then exhausted by his talking
Into silence he relapséd.

Sleeping were Winli and Hazika;—
Their attendance on the sick man
By the friar was dispensed with,—
Whom they recognized as noble,
And whose unknown rank and station
Curiosity awakened.
By the glimmer of a lantern,
Through the night's long weary watches
Staid Tannhäuser by the stroller,—
Cooled for him his feverish forehead,
Gave him drink and consolation.
As the agéd player stroller
Motionless there lay before him,
To the bosom of Tannhäuser
Memory brought back adventures
With the fiddle-king connected
Many years since;—he reflected
How much merriment and pleasure
Also painful gloomy moments,
He had passed in this man's presence.
Back, his days of boyhood into,
Reached his memory of the stroller.
First of that occasion thought he
When at Regensberg he met him

After quitting Barbarossa,—
And from the noose there released him; —
Then recalled that second meeting
Near the Adamunter Convent,
Where explained his mother's vision
In the forest old Spervogel,—
And thereby had first impelled him
On the road to Love and Woman.
  Next their merry life in Vienna
At the Babenberger Palace,—
Then their Oden Forest journey
And their ride to imperial Venice,—
Also, special, their crusading,
With the frightful bloody combats
At Byzantium and in Syria; —
Then their journey back to Rhinegau,
And his final misadventures
'Neath the shadows of the Wartburg.
  Everywhere, in joy and sorrow,
As two faithful friends and brothers
They had always held together.
With the checkered life and glory
Of the famous knight Tannhäuser
No man was so interwoven
As this poor and honest stroller.
  When his eyes had closed Tannhäuser
On the morrow,— in that moment
Would the final tie be severed
'Twixt himself and other mortals.
That fell burden on his conscience
Could he speak of to none other;
This man only,— always ready
To forgive him all his errors —

To him would have clung through all things,
With him would have plunged in hell-fire; —
Now he lay before him, dying.
After living brave and jolly
As a gifted player-stroller,
Calm and happy he was dying,—
Nothing having to repent of.
  Daybreak glimmered, and Spervogel
Knew that death was fast approaching,
But unclouded were his senses.
Little said he,— scarcely audible —
"Honor and esteem the strollers —
Minstrels kings are, over all men" —
Were the last words by him uttered,
Slow and disconnected spoken.
  Winli, Hazika and Tannhäuser
Were the only bedside watchers,
Saving that mysterious presence
Which was waiting to receive him
In its kind benignant bosom.
  Sudden lighted up the countenance
Of the Fiddle King with radiance
As he, with his left hand groping,
Sought to grasp his bow and fiddle,
Which lay near him as his treasures
Part concealed beneath the bed clothes.
With the bow he tugged and wrestled
But in vain,— for strength was lacking,—
So with deep beseeching glances
Ofterdingen he appealed to.
  He, complying, took the fiddle
And the Tann-hussäre fiddled
Low melodious tuneful measures,

— Sitting by the old-time master —
Whose emaciated features
Flashes of emotion lighted,
And 't was plain that he was listening.
  Solemnly and slow — consoling —
From the fiddle fell harmonious
Low and plaintive slumber measures ;—
Now the muffled strains of music
Almost died out to a whisper,—
Now diminished pianissimo
In prolonged and soothing accents
To a thread of finest number,—
Final farewell sad betokening.
  Thus the noble knight, Tannhäuser,
With his dreamy restful music
Into God's eternal slumber
Played his faithful well loved follower.
When had passed away his spirit,
Ceased his fiddling Ofterdingen,—
And, while tears were copious falling,
Down he sank beside the dead man.
  In the middle of the empire
— Which the jolly wandering fiddler
All his lifetime had been traversing —
Was the village,— with its churchyard
On a hillside situated.
Toward Franconia distant gazing
Meadows, rivers, mountain summits,
Spreading forests,— all were visible.
There they laid away the stroller,—
Close beside him in his coffin
Placed his darling bow and fiddle,—
On his grave a linden planted.

Winli, Hazika and Tannhäuser
By themselves were mournful standing
Just beside the fresh turned hillock,
And thus spoke Tannhäuser, earnest: —
"Soundly sleep,— belovéd brother!
Cannot rear a marble tombstone
With the inscription cut upon it
Once composed by Vogelweide.
Thou wilt never be forgotten,
But immortal live in ballads.
When will e'er another stroller
On Earth come in course of ages
With such joyous heart and utterance,—
With such trusty bow and weapon?
Seems to me I see thee fiddling
In the presence of the Almighty,—
With celestial radiance clothéd.
Rest awhile from constant strolling,—
Then, respected by all strollers,
Join the angelic hosts of Heaven!"
Then all three kneeled down in sorrow,
Mutely praying; — when 'twas ended,
Winli eying close the friar
Asked the question; — "Sir,— who are you?
All who knew the man who lies there
Loved him,— but among the nobles
— For I see that is your station —
Know I but one single person
So attached and heart-devoted
To the king of all us strollers.
Henry, Knight of Ofterdingen,
Cavalier world-famous, noble
Minnesinger, are you surely,—

Called Tannhäuser! So confess it!"
"Yes, I am he!" — said Tannhäuser,—
"Here in my companion's presence
I will tell no wicked falsehood."
With great pleasure eyed him Hazika,
The handsome brunette, and Winli; —
Winli said,— "Sir, we are only
Strolling artists, but if later
With our blood or ev'n existence
We repay can the devotion
Which to this man you have proven,
Sir, command us! — At your service!"
Added then the kindly Hazika,—
"I am sure your monkish capote
Sorrow covers; — At all cross-roads
I will pray for thy salvation,
And that thou may'st yet be happy."
But Tannhäuser — melancholy —
Only pressed their hands in friendship,
And the pair in silence left him.

Lonely,— in that little church-yard
Stood Tannhäuser, thus reflecting; —
"Love remains when life has vanished!
To the living death bequeathes it,—
And there are yet on this planet
Those who show me love and reverence."

XII

ROME

Tannhäuser stood near Rome. Upon a hillock
Northwest the Sepulchre of Hadrian
He halted from his previous rapid gait,—
For lay before him the Eternal City
Spread out and glistening in the evening sun.

The pilgrim had his long and weary way
Alone pursued, avoiding company.
For him on earth no longer joy existed,
His deep remorse was shared by no companion;—
Therefor, all social converse with his fellows,
Their questions and their scrutiny avoiding,
Alone and silent, hasty he had traveled.
Along the Brenner Passway he had journeyed,
And in that fickle early springtime season
Among the peaks 'twas very cold and wintry.
The clouds hung heavily in solid masses,
And driven by the ice-king's freezing breath
Were floating low, from chasm to chasm careering,

The mountain's scarpments in great part obscuring,—
While towered above the nebulous sea of vapor
In dazzling white the lofty snow-capped peaks.
'T was so with Ofterdingen,— he was burdened,
His breast was fettered fast by melancholy,—
And yet right valiantly he bore himself
And hopeful looked upon the immediate future,
Which, purified from all his previous errors
By weighty penance, to himself he pictured.
Adown the valley coursed the brawling Eisach;
Tannhäuser, close beside the valley following,
Was forced to pass Burg Seben and with sadness
Upon those olden pleasant days reflected.
In gloomy twilight 't was he journeyed by,
A single look above him scarcely risking,
But toward that vineyard cast he questing glances
Where erst and oft with Otta he had dallied,
And failed to make it out, naught recognizing;
So, resolutely all remembrance stifling,
He quickly passed on toward that distant land
In which he thought to gain full absolution.
How much to see this land he long had wished,
This land of deep blue skies, so famed for sunshine,
Imperial buildings and Caesarian sway,
Which once *urbi et orbi* ruled supreme,—
From which the mighty realm of Christendom
The Roman Pope's infallible dicts received
When solemn once announced,— "*Roma locuta*".
Now, on Italian soil, what his position?
Not as a chieftain, mounted and victorious,
With helm and shield beside his royal master,—
Not with his harp as celebrated minstrel
To whose melodious verse fair women listened,—
But as a penitent in pilgrim garments

Whose flying footsoles heated were with walking,
Whose heart burned hotter yet with fierce repentance;
A suppliant, prepared to do obeisance
Before the Roman Pope in Peter's chair,
In quest of absolution for his sins.
  Meanwhile upon his thorny path he journeyed,
His heart by signs of spring's approach enlivened,
Which in the buds and tendrils of the vineyards,
The swelling fig trees and the glistening chestnuts
And in the ruddy almond shoots were visible.
Already blew from Southland softer breezes
Which in the olive's blue-gray foliage rustled,
And stirred the waving peaks of evergreenings
With ivy overrun,—new to the traveler.
  Through strong-walled towns with overlooking ramparts
Tannhäuser plodded on and, when exhausted,
He lodging sought with some good cloister brother.
In market-place and street he saw, astonished,
The fierce determined thirst for liberty,
The pride of guild and commonwealth which, zealous,
Of old and newly chartered privilege boasted,
And on its self-won powers firmly rested.
  Thus 't was, the lofty Appenines descending,
Through Tuscany's tilled fields he came to Rome,
And like to Moses on the Nebo Mountain
Who looked from far upon the promised land,
Tannhäuser too his final hill ascended,—
Imperial Rome to observe before his entrance.
  A herdsman, who beneath the arching pines
And dark hued overhanging cypress branches
Was tending goats, informed 't was Monte Malo,
And courteous answered all the eager questions
Propounded by the foreign wayfarer.

'T was there he rested, leaning on his staff,
And never wearied gazing on the picture
Which here unrolled itself beneath his feet.
On his right hand, but somewhat to his rear,
The sun was slowly sinking and was gilding
City and fields with shining beams of light.
Upon his left the placid flowing Tiber
Its lengthy curving course took 'midst the meadows,
And next lay Rome surrounded by its ramparts.
What mainly drew the pilgrim's close attention
Was the colossal grayish colored towers,
Four cornered, massive, with their twin-like steeples
Which, scattered here and there, Rome dominated,—
So numerous and of such lofty stature
Their shadows shot afar from one to another,—
While here and there, conspicuous 'mong the houses,
The wondrous structures of old Roman days
Loomed up in thick set groups, and sometimes singly,
Enchaining sight, entrancing all one's senses.
Aside, to West, appeared to Ofterdingen
By cloister walls and chapels quite surrounded
The Church of the Apostle Chief, Saint Peter,—
And at the other end of Rome, opposed,
The acknowledged head and mother of all churches
Devoted to the culte of Baptist John;
Then not far off the splendid Vatican,
The papal mansion and Tannhäuser's goal.
His vision rested long upon that quarter,
As if intent on fathoming the thoughts
And final sentence of the Holy Father.
Meantime more golden grew the illumination
As the evening sun declined,— the city glittered,
The towers glowed, the ramparts seemed afire,
The grayish stones seemed new life to acquire

With warm and yellowish tinges permeated,
And all the landscape lay in peace and smiling.
  The pilgrim then his eager vision turned
To where in the Campagna's verdant meadows
'Mid wide spread fields and rolling elevations
The aqueducts their long and sinuous pathways
Pursued, and in the horizon disappeared.
The air transparent was and crystalline,
The distant Alban and the Sabine Mountains
Were now enrobed in wondrous play of color
Bright red and violet; — their towering summits
Defined in sharp agreeably curving outline.
High up in air, in form of pendent roses,
Were floating fleecy clouds with sunlight glinting.
  A sight it was which in his native country
The minstrel ne'er had seen; — he gazed with rapture
And, gazing, for awhile forgot his sorrow.
The sun had set, with it the glow had flown,
A leaden gray fell over field and mountain,
The seven-billed city lay enwrapped in gloom.

  Tannhäuser now walked on, and when at last
The gate he entered in and took to threading
The streets of Rome, it seemed as if must meet him
Attired in purple bordered snow-white togas
With greeting words in Ciceronian language
The men of Rome, Senatus Populusque.
Then once more racked him cruel speculations;
Would he at length quit the Eternal City
From guilt absolved, at peace with his Redeemer,
Or as a cast-away, forever damned?
  Aimless, he wandered through the narrow roadway,

Nor noticed that a serving man was following
Upon his steps, in buffle coat and helmet,
With sword in hand and often near him gliding,
Observing him until came recollection,
Then crossed himself and in good German spoke: —
"May all good angels bless and praise the Lord!
Is it really you, or is this but your ghost
Which here in Rome in pilgrim garb walks round?"
Disturbed Tannhäuser asked; — "Know you my person?
I am a stranger, made of flesh and blood."
"By my red beard, your voice I recognize!
God save you, Sir,— Herr Ritter Ofterdingen!
Have you forgot?" — he cried in joyful tones;
"My name is Reinprecht, came from Saint Goar,—
With you I helped to storm Byzantium,
Was by your side that day the smoke entrapped us;
What was the name of that huge burning castle?
And now I serve the Baron Frangipanni;
In Italy we Germans have great license,
In Rome they like us well as paid retainers
And always pay us double, gold and lashes.
If I can serve you, Sir, with joy I'll do it!"
"Thanks, friend! — a mattress find me for to-night,
And drink to boot,— I fully will requite thee,—
Now, one thing more, my name tell not to any!"
"Then follow to the top of Palatine
Where we among the ruins live quite merry,
Retainers, monks, and flitter-mice and jackdaws,
And none are there, to ask what is your errand!"
Thus chatting on, they walked along together
Ascending Palatine, and Reinprecht brought him
Such store of food and drink as he could offer,
And gave him then a comfortable bed.
Tannhäuser slept in imperial Flavian's Palace.

Next day Tannhäuser, much invigorated,
Beheld the Palatine's enormous structures,—
In ruins here, and there in fair condition.
On firm foundations, crowned by massive pillars
Of tophus stone and solid tilings, rested
The high spanned vaulted arches and partitions;
Their ruined roofs broken and pierced and creviced
Heaven's light admitting to illume the darkness,
While verdant tendrils, lamp-like, hung suspended.
Resplendent, gilded by the morning sunshine,
Constructed tier on tier, high towered up
The oft enlarged renowned imperial palaces
Of Augustus, Tiberius and Domitian,
Septimius Severus' Septizonium
Still well preserved and seven stories high:—
While high in air, all others dominating,
Arose Caligula's great piles of stone.
The Jovian temples yet were standing there,
Hard by the famous tomb of Romulus
Religiously preserved by his successors.
Tannhäuser wandered through the spacious areas
Which on this famous classic soil he peopled
With visions of the Roman days and language.
The separate Atrium and dormitories,
The Aula with its Apsis and its Gallery,
Vestibulum, Trielinium and Tablinum,
The brightly lighted Court, luxurious Bath,
The sacrificial place, the Lares Altar,
And the Exedra with its rows of benches.
How busy were Tannhäuser's mind and senses,
Reflecting on this world of imperial might!
Where long ago, in spite of shocking morals,
Full many a lofty intellect expanded,—
And spun their verses Virgil and Horatius

In the precincts of famed Augustus Caesar.
To that quadrangle then he bent his steps
Where once the Augurs watched the flight of birds
And, thence divining, prophesied the future;
From that, the highest point, to gaze around him,—
But what he saw he looked upon with horror.
  The city seemed composed of hills and valleys
In places bare, in places built and peopled;—
He saw some market gardens and some vineyards,
Some marshy spots, while pots and other rubbish
In piles were heaped against the old foundations
Of the Basilika, long since demolished,—
And 'gainst the triple stone triumphal arches,
The old Triumphal Course with filth obstructing.
In crescent shape a portico was visible
In ruins, shadeless, long deprived of roofing;
In desolation stood those ancient theatres
Where formerly the enthusiastic concourse
Applauded Plautus' and Terentius' dramas.
The Colosseum's stately massive oval
In towering height stood forth, most like a hill;
Of Diocletian's, Caracalla's Thermae,
Which once, magnificent and quite imposing,
In outward bounds excelled the other marvels,
There were but ruins left of old-time grandeur;
Yet in their décadénce quite fascinating.
  Circus and Stadium o'ergrown with bushes,
Burst aqueducts, neglected monuments
And crumbling weather beaten masonry
The gazing stranger everywhere confronted.
The tangled maze of crooked lanes seemed endless,
'Mong which a temple-gable, green with mosses,
And eke one solitary column loomed;
An architrave, on marble columns resting,

Contrastingly looked down on humble mansions,—
The drudging people forcibly reminding
Of its laborious later time existence,
Where once the ancient mythic worship flourished.
"Is this the City Eterne, Roma Quadrata,
Of whose imperial splendor travelers tell us?
In which the treasures of the world were gathered,
Adorning it with the most wondrous riches
E'er given to mortal man to heap together?"
Thus asked Tannhäuser; "Are they thus neglecting
The godlike works of their patrician fathers—?
Away!—unless my vision is deceptive
I quick can touch with hands what is before me!"
And then he sought the experienced Reinprecht out,
Availing of his aid and practised guidance,—
But ceased not his complainings 'mid the ruins
Which he, now traversing, beheld more clearly.
What the barbarian's vengeance had escaped
And time's incisive tooth had mildly dealt with,
Its builders' vile descendants, as destroyers,
From the ancient palaces were constant stealing.
For the construction of new towers and castles
The solid flagstones they had torn from fastenings,
The marble facings from their former backings.
As spoil all took as much as possible,
Each to enrich his fortune and his mansion
Which 'gainst some crumbling palace snugly nestled;
While what they failed to break off from the pillars
As substance for their caps and pediments
Was as church ornament appropriated,
And that was its salvation from destruction.
The chisel's finest works, choice furniture,
They stole and put to every kind of service;
As butcher's counter served a marble table

Supported by the costliest wingéd griffins;
A cobbler cobbled in an ancient armchair
In which perhaps a consul once reposed.
And worse and worse! — surpassing art creations,
Sarcophagi, the costliest sculptured friezes
And statues of the gods hurled down from pedestals
Were smashed in pieces and trod down in ditches,
To burn white marble figures into quicklime.
  Tannhäuser, whose soul things artistic worshiped,
Who always found delight in contemplating
Imposing buildings and excelling statues,
To whom invention was his chiefest pleasure,—
Tannhäuser was in highest degree indignant
At all this indiscriminate destruction,—
And spying out a leather-aproned fellow
As he with heavy hammer in his presence
Was breaking up a marble Satyr-Hermes,
He grappled with the thief and earthward hurled him
So forcibly that blood ran down his visage.
  'Mong his companions rose a great commotion;
Incensed they fell upon the daring pilgrim
With all their implements, but them escaping
He quickly made his way where Reinprecht waited,—
To whom some serving men assisting rallied,
And from the fracas soon emerged the victor,—
Such strife in Roman streets being naught unusual.
  The two companions now proceeded further
The ruins to view of Nero's Golden Palace,
Also Maxentius' Basilika
And the trio of massive giant arches,
In Caesar's and the old republic's forum.
There temples still were standing, not in ruins
And to the skies were pointing slender columns
With their ornate corinthian capitals

And decorated hanging cornices.
  There stood triumphal arches, proud erect,
With copious sculpture richly ornamented;
To memorable deeds inscriptions witnessed,
And everywhere high art had bent its powers
To honor great and elevate things lesser.
But all these splendid piles were in decay,
Great fragments lay around in thick array
Heaped high and higher above the virgin soil
And long had covered in the Sacra Via,
Which from the splendid Arch of Constantine
Directly to the Capitol conducted
And many a grand triumphal march had witnessed.
This grave of regal grandeur contemplating,
Tannhäuser stood; — antiquity's great soul
A thousand memories in his breast awoke.
  "Where hidest thou" — so cried he — "ancient Rostrum
Whence once Mark Antony the eulogy
Of Imperator Julius Caesar spoke?
Art hid in dirt? If so, I bless the soil
Which from the greed of robbers thee protects,
And many a relic, many a godlike statue
From desecration now protecting hides,—
Until the dawn of later-day researches
With gems those generations shall enrich."
  And then he further wandered with his mentor,
While every step convinced him more and clearer
How in his own day might and power were dominant
And rivalry broke out in brawls and quarrels.
In Rome were numerous contentious factions;
Within Rome's boundaries begirt with walls
The domineering nobles' homes were scattered;
Those ancient Roman structures they had chosen
Which fierce barbarian onsets had resisted,

To massive fortresses converting them,
And superadded formidable towers
And fastened all with heavy chains of iron.
  The Tomb of Hadrian and Pompey's Theatre
Were held and occupied by the Orsini,—
In Campus Martius the Colonna family
Augustus' Mausoleum had usurped;
The Frangipanni proudly lorded over
The Coelian Hill and neighboring Palatine,
Close pressed by Stephaneschi and Romani;
The Aventine was held by the Savelli,
The Stadium of Domitian by the Massimi,—
In Trajan's and in Nerva's spacious fora
The Conti race their strongholds had selected;
In the Marcellus Theatre were enthronéd
Pierleoni,— and the Gaetani
Within the walls memorial of Metellus.
  Thus 't was that many influential nobles
Had turned old Roman buildings into castles,—
Thence with their mercenaries making sorties,
Endless engaged in feuds and fierce vendettas.
Their haughtiness Tannhäuser's self experienced;
A cavalcade of the proud Conti family,
Glittering with arms, hard by Minerva's Temple
In overweening pride passed by; — Count Richard
Audacious rode against him with his stallion
And to the wall he forced the German pilgrim,
While on a jestword followed jeering laughter.
The mounted men kept on, but in the spurned one
His hot inherited blood, enraged, boiled out:
  "If I with such a charger were provided,
And sword and lance, rash man, thou should'st repent it!"
  Thus muttered he, but must restrain his anger,—
For now he wore the garb of expiation

And Richard Conti was the Pope's own brother.
But bitterly he felt the indignity,
Which on himself had fallen,— himself a noble.

But where then was the Might, which from this Rome,
As once the Roman legions with their eagles,
Now ruled the world with weapons spiritual,—
And never yet its head so high had carried
As in these days?— 'T was at the Vatican.
Pope Innocent the Third was well instructed
In matters of belief and things religious; —
A mind astute, inflexibly determined,
Beyond all measure craving general sway.
A practised statesman, he was always aiming
Himself to avail of German princely strife
And to his service bend the Hohenstaufens;
Intent on planting there, as tried by Gregory,
The Church of Rome as source of highest power,—
Himself supreme to make and arbiter
To whom all kings perforce must be obedient.
Men feared and honored him, conversing;
God's representative was to the masses
Mysterious wrapped in perfect holiness,—
Was seen but seldom, and whoever neared him
Was by the iron pontiff dominated.
The pope with luxury himself surrounded,
A glittering spectacle presenting all,—
Which in connection with the ritual
On all believers made a deep impression.
High art, neglected as to old memorials,
Found cult and open welcome in the churches
Which, new constructed, now adorned the city.
The porphyry pillars and the marble friezes

From ancient palaces and temples taken
Now decorated pulpits, naves and altars.
The classic models were by sculptors studied;
The rugged forms of early christian days
By zeal created, not artistic genius,
With pagan beauty were rejuvenated.
  But copied were too close the ancient models,
And the Apostles by the artist chiseled
Religiously were yet but imitations
Of mythologic gods, with circling halos;
The Virgin Mary yonder looked like Juno,
And Saint Johannes was Apollo, sainted.
  Thus constant waxed the churches' ornamentation;
Above the chancel holy scenes were pictured,—
In beauteous colors pict with golden background
And represented in tableaus mosaic,
The bible legends worshipers confronted
As from the Highest promising salvation;
Glass paintings in the lofty windows glinted,
Upon the tilings throwing lights and shadows;
The air seemed tinted to the farthest corners,
And lovely colors played among the arches
The pilasters and pillars tall and slender,
Enwrapped and twined about with evergreen'ry.
To serve the Almighty nothing was too costly
When countless priests and prelates celebrated
Religious service in their gorgeous vestments.
  Tannhäuser saw this great display and glamour
With great amaze, and further saw quite clearly
That here a power was poised on soaring pinions
Which crafty, mystical, itself surrounded
With all the influence of awful secrets;—
And fears and hopes, anathemas and blessings
In all hearts planted as its will inclined to.

Such then was Rome as seen by Ofterdingen.
By turns imbued with varying impressions
He traversed it; — now reverent recalling
The genius of those vanished Roman days,—
Now charmed and ravished by such rare examples
Of ancient art as never had he witnessed;
Then by the Roman chivalry down trampled,
Which here was fain to brawl for self advantage, —
While he his sword had swung for right and honor
And in the cause of Philip Hohenstaufen; —
And last and always felt himself enmeshed by
That mighty power, its aim ne'er losing sight of, —
Whose spiritual faith men's souls took captive,
With outward show and pageantry ensnared them,
And, direst vengeance threatening, terrified them.
With dread he approached that stern unbending power;
Yet quite alone, without one friend to advise,
And by his terror-laden conscience tortured
Before the Roman Pope he soon must stand.
The day was near which Innocent appointed
To hear the foreign pilgrim's dire confession;
The day Tannhäuser knew,— of it forewarned, —
And trembling in his limbs at every zephyr
Which stirred the Roman streets, he started off.

XIII

THE VATICAN

The hour was near. 'T was at the Vatican,
Which an imperial court was very like.
About the vast and stately papal palace,
—Adjoining John the Baptist's mother church—
Prevailed a busy hurried coming and going,—
While round the weighty and important dicts
Was thrown an air of mystery and weight,
Which in the mien of all was manifested.
Officials whisp'ring scurried in and out,
Inside closed doors were many conferences,
And parchment writings hither, thither carried,—
While with the greatest emulation followed
Their separate duties priests and secretaries;
The halberdeers were posted, couriers mounted
And rode away the Pope's scripts to deliver.
Tannhäuser saw that here the cords were woven
For that huge net which all the world encircled,
And shuddering felt himself therein entangled.
In trembling expectation he awaited
His summons to attend the Holy Father,

Who to receive the pilgrim had appointed
Within the richly decorated chapel.
And now the time approached,—'twas hinted him
He must commence by doing fit obeisance.
The marble flagstones of the holy staircase
— Which 'twas permitted none to tread upon,
Because on them descended holy Christus
When doomed to death — which from Jerusalem
To Rome transplanted were from Pilate's mansion,
Upon his knees the penitent ascended,
On every stone a fervent prayer outbreathing,—
Until at length he reverently entered
The Vatican's Sancta Sanctorum door.
And now stood face to face two human beings,
Such as in life but seldom meet together.
The one in loose pontifical apparel,
Who from his earliest years had skillful blended
An outer humble mien with mental cunning,
The insigna of his lofty station wearing;—
The second one with battle hardened figure,
But clad in pilgrim's robe in place of armor;—
The one a statesman, world-wide power wielding,
Before whom bent in awe all true believers,—
The other poor in pelf, with naught on Earth
His martial deeds except, and knightly fame,
For which to himself alone was he beholden.
The cynosures and marvels of their epoch,
With highest talents each of them was gifted.
With eagle glance Tannhäuser then transfixing,
Quick recognized the pope that in this pilgrim
— Now boldly facing him with martial bearing
And piercing eyes deep set in pallid face—
No common sinner was his gaze confronting,
Who wished of homicide to make confession.

Thus he commenced.— "Thou hast on this insisted,
To me alone canst thou the crime unburden
Which brings thee here to Rome so sore oppressed
That thou no other prelate mayest confide in
Except God's chosen proxy and vicegerent.
To thy persistent urging I have yielded,—
As 't were 'fore God thou standest here; speak, stranger!"
Apostrophizing then the Holy Trinity,
He crossed himself in presence of the penitent
And in a vacant armchair gently dropping
Upon its bronzen sides his arms he rested.
"A noble am I," — thus commenced the pilgrim
While on his knees before the holy pontiff,—
"A noble and a poet, most holy father,—
Tannhäuser I am called throughout Germania;"—
"Art thou Tannhäuser? Then I know thee well,—
The Hohenstaufens' never conquered champion,
And Walter von der Vogelweide's friend!
That's guilt enough in my own estimation,
But if repentant now,"— said Innocent:—
Dissenting, Ofterdingen shook his head:
"And in thy judgment were such error doubled,
As light 't would be as one dissevered roseleaf
In balance weighed against the Alpine masses,
To that which pityless my soul weighs down.
Never before from lips of malefactor
Has heard thy shudd'ring ear such dire misdoing
As that which now to thee must be confided,—
Nor with such deep contrition e'er has mortal
Lain prostrate at thy feet as him thou viewest."
"From thee speaks out a heavy-burdened conscience,"
Replying said the Pope,— "and such commencement
Some strange occurrence causes me to augur.
Thy fame has published far thy deeds of daring,—

To accomplish glorious deeds thou hast always aimed,
Hast never flinched in face of threatening dangers,—
And unforgotten 'tis that some years since
With crimson cross upon thy Templar's mantle
Of Holy Church's faith thou wast a champion.
Thy life's career to me has been no secret,
And to the most renowned of knights and minstrels,
— Even though till now never the Pontiff's friend —
Who all has conquered easier than himself,
— As far as human failings go — I accord
Most willing my indulgence in advance.
So take good heart! whatever thee has troubled,
Thy soul unlock, with all its deep transgressions,
And tell me also how 'twas thou wert tempted."

"In Convent Adamunt I dwelt, in Austria,
As novice most one year, and then as Yunker
I rode away in quest of love and passion.
I found them too with many a gracious woman
And free enjoyed their heart-ensnaring favors,—
As from their parent stems one gathers roses
When fresh and blooming in their virgin fragrance.
And yet no rest I found or satisfaction.
A child I am of hazard and of passion,
My father knew, but never saw my mother;—
To land I fell not heir, nor rich possessions
Except the natal gifts in me implanted,
— Intense ambition and o'erwhelming passion—
Which at my birth, my nature dominating,
To me transmitted were as my inheritance.
Thus in my breast has throbbed a burning heart
With hot tumultuous appetites instinct,—
In its pursuings always more desiring
Than mortals is allowed, or them conceded.
'T was passion, everpresent, irremediable,

Which occupied my thoughts, my strength exhausting,
And of my being held entire possession.
To me it was the grandest highest feeling
Which ever entered in a human heart,—
The sweetest tenant and most fascinating
E'er welcomed to and rocked in mortal breast,—
Broad-reaching as the Earth and constellations,
In lustre them surpassing; — Ah! my longing
For woman's boundless unreserved affection
To which I aspired, such giant form took on,—
To me 't was more than even my soul's salvation!
  But not as millions round me were content
In woman's transient passion to be happy
Was my desire. No! It was otherwise
Her love I sought to comprehend and capture; —
To penetrate I wished behind the curtain
By Nature spun and wove impermeable,
Beyond the bound'ries of men's physical sense; —
With outward semblance not content I wished
The very germ of woman's love to grasp,
And with its subtlest breath myself to fuse;
With soulful aspirations and emotions
Enjoyment's rapturous sting I wished to mix
Into one stream of heavenly ecstasy
As free as air, withouten dross or soilure.
Such to me seemed affection's strongest bond,
In woman and myself persistent sought.
  In course of life the hearts of many women
And fitness for such love sublime I've probed,—
The intricatest clues have earnest followed,
Their inmost thoughts to ferret out and master..
But, ah! it was a useless undertaking;
'Twere easier far to penetrate night's darkness
And clearly see this planet's hidden centre,

And through a thousand labyrinthine mazes
Of Earth's primeval rocks and gushing fountains
My footsteps errant sure and safely guide,
Than feminine hearts to fully comprehend.
One thing I know, for in their warm embraces
I have learned it well; — impassioned longing dwells
Instinctive too in woman's ardent bosom.
Wherefore, I ask myself, do they hold back,
And of their passion's bent a secret make?
Wherefore is man's devotion by the sex
So hotly wished, so cold denied their own?
Are they all hypocrites, intending slyly
By self-imposed renouncing self-constraint
The magic influence of their charms to heighten?
Or are they only cowardly and shy,
Nor mind nor strength sufficiently possessing
Unstinted passion's bliss to man to offer,—
In turn again demanding it of him?
  Such questions, Father, have I often asked,
But never yet received one single answer
And never reached the object of my longing.
At length I felt that I alone of mortals
Such subtile love to feel by Fate was destined,
And ardent wished god-like to enjoy alone
In my own fashion, totally unfettered,
The most ecstatic joys on Earth existing
Which human dwellers on this soil can offer.
A dream;"— Tannhäuser paused in the endeavor
The worst of his confession to unburden.
  At that, his closing word the Pope took up
And said: —" A dream indeed! a hollow dream,
Senseless and culpable, against God's edict,—
Such wish to gain by force or wicked cunning
What he in his great wisdom has denied us,

And man's beclouded sense in vain pursues.
Thy fiery heart how feebly hast thou kept
From base seductions and unbridled wishes!
Spurred on by promptings of thy carnal lustings
Was thy research for passion's mystery,
By which thou hast thyself thy fortunes ship-wrecked.
Dost thou despise that modest gracious shame
Which makes of women the defence and jewel?
And dost thou not perceive that wrapped in mystery
Lies hid away the greatest female charm
Which, were the veil withdrawn, with it would vanish?
But guiltier than such wicked self-deception
Is that thy other arrogant desire
Above all others as a god to live,
Thy fellow mortals infinite surpassing,—
And in thy selfish seeking after passion
To aim at gaining booty without limit,
And freely and unpunished to enjoy it.
Shameful and sinful was thy aspiration,
And all thy strivings ever visionary."

"Not all, most holy father!" spoke Tannhäuser:—
"So near was I to Love's supremest blessing
That I already felt its tender breathings.
Deep passion entered in my ardent breast
Stronger by far than e'er before experienced,
And her I loved I deemed express created
To be my idol and my heart's desire:—
What I had dreamed, hoped for and earnest quested,
I saw incarnate, saw myself possessing.
The bond of love my own rash act destroyed
Which us so near, so near had bound together;—
Denied, rejected by my heart's belovéd,
Grew dark my soul with frantic desperation,
And Fate's decretal rushed to its fruition.

A dream, which in that night when I was born
My mother dear with juggling words had dazzled,
My downfall was,— on it I staked my fortunes.
O, Holy Father! turn away thy visage!
So very hard it is to make confession
That look thee in thy face and speak I cannot!
At length convinced I was, 'twas very sure
That I would never find the love I sought,—
And since denied me 't was in God's own sunlight
I sought it there where it was promised me,—
I sought it,— sought it, — in the depths of Hell!
To Venus in the accurséd Hörselberg
My steps I bent,— to her my prayers addressed,
And Everlasting God denied and cursed."
  Quick crossed himself the Pope while back recoiling;
"Unhappy man! To Venus in that hill?
Impossible,—' t was but a dream,— thou ravest!"
  Tannhäuser with his hands his visage covered,
While down his sunburnt cheeks great tears were rolling.
  "O horrible unspeakable misdeed,—
Almost beyond the ken of mortal senses!
But speak on further! further! what took place?
What sawest thou inside the Hörselberg?"
"Dispense with that, O Father!" begged Tannhauser,—
"Almost to madness drives me recollection."
  "Suppose it should! What other choice hast thou?
Compared to thy impending punishment
Madness itself is as the unstable wind
Which over dry and withered flowers blows.
What happened there I wish to know precisely,—
Nothing must thou conceal, nor palliate."
  "The worst is told,—so be it with the rest,"
With trembling lips the pallid pilgrim said,—
His voice grew husky and his eyes rolled wildly,

As if what he must now describe and picture
Corporeal were and to his vision present,—
And with much painful effort he began.
"Through a cavernous cleft in the Hörselberg
I entered in and spoke the word,
The magic word; — the gloom dispersed,
And suddenly the barriers burst.
I passed on through, the path was broad,—
It seemed as if both time and space
To exist had ceased in that desolate place,
And lost I were in an empty void.
An unseen path I slid along,
As wafted swift on pinions strong
Through desert wastes which barred my way; —
'T was twilight there and misty gray,—
Of clouds were none, not even a trace,
As in the depths of infinite space.
At last a halt! Before me stood
Material, with outline rude,
A something there,— a castle tall,—
In the deepest abyss of all.
Of coal-black tiles were its walls and arches,
In places traversed by veinings of silver,—
Grottoes and corridors, stairways and porches
Lighted by ruby-like crystals' glimmer,—
And all around a desert drear,
No living creature far or near.
A twilight dim, immensity dread,
Nothing was there to the eye to show
In that shoreless measureless ocean of shade,
Except that castle's fiery glow.
'Twas still as death,— issued no sound
Apparent to listener mortal,—
The stairway ascending, myself I found
Before an open portal.

But as soon as my primal step was made
And over the threshold echoed my tread,
Then broke out an uproar deafening
As of mountains riven and tossed,
Until with clangor echoing
In the infinite void 't was lost.
Then all was still,— and fear unworthy
Invaded me; — what lies before thee?
But my planted foot I drew not back
In spite of that din from Erebus black,—
For at last, defying Hell's power unfelt,
The spot I had reached where Venus dwelt.
I ascended the stairs of the castle high
While sphinxes gazed with questioning eye,—
Reclining there,— not cut from stone,
But alive and made of flesh and bone,—
Yet motionless; — voluptuous women
With curving claws, and bodies leonine.
  Through spacious halls I further advanced,
Where glimmering lamps suspended glanced,—
With mother of pearl the walls were laid in,
Which dripping with wet gleamed irridescent,—
Like scaly adder's changeable skin
Endowed with motion crescent.
And everywhere was profusion grand,
By pigmies wrought but by demons planned,
Of gold and jewels blended; —
With bronzen frieze tall columns shone,
Each cornice high was of polished stone,
The fittings all were splendid; —
Vessels and platters of silver ware
With fruits were heaped, and potions rare
Filled up the golden goblets.
And further on 'mong pleasant bowers

Were nodding thousands of glistening flowers,
In polished vases costliest.
Unearthly lustre from them gleamed; —
With wondrous play of color beamed
Narcissi, roses golden,
Deep in their chalices stolen; —
Earth's flowers unlike of modest guise
Around they peered with lovesick eyes,
And the tremulous light they greedy drank
As they amorous ogled, rank on rank.
With my spirit their perfume seducing was mixed,
In my soul their passions engend'ring,—
With sensual lust my frame they transfixed,
Exciting longings tormenting.
  But where was she for whose sake alone
I had come to this spot infernal?
For up to now no trace was shown
Of Venus' presence supernal.
  "O Venus!" I cried in that silence profound,
"Deny not thyself to my pleasure,—
Forever thy willing slave I'll be bound,
If thou wilt but love beyond measure!"
Then in my ears loud shrilled elfin song,
As if from the flowers the music had come,—
A harmony sweet, entrancing; —
And over me floated, as butterflies roam,
A bevy of roses scarce seen in the gloam,—
My pathway to show me, advancing.
I followed those fluttering guides of the air
With their magical flight and their fragrance rare
And the music overpowering;
They guided me on to a distant post
But dimly illumed,—'t was impossible most
To see through the twilight lowering.

An alcove before in the glittering wall
Mysterious hung a curtain tall,
Its folds luxurious waving ; —
The roses halted directly there
And down they sank from the ambient air,
A velvety carpet making.
With a fluttering heart I confronted there
That beckoning door ; —pass in should I dare?
But when to the curtain I hastened,
And resolute lifted my tremulous hand
Aside it was drawn as with magical wand,
And there stood I in amazement.
O Holy Father,—thou sawest her not !
Condemn my guilt upon this spot !
A man I am and the fault is mine,
May God absolve me from that crime !
Than human will 'twas stronger far ;
What I thought and felt while motionless there
I scarce recollect, — a faltering cry
From my bosom escaped and pierced the sky.
The most incomparable woman was there
On a purple couch, enticing, —
Her ravishing form displaying, most rare
Of Heaven's or Hell's devising.
No veil the view of her charms confined ;
In the atmosphere carnation
As sculpt from ivory she reclined
And all aflame with passion.
In her conquering beauty she fully possessed
The resistless sweetness of woman,—
And to me she breathed with heaving breast
A passionate fiery welcome.

And when she smiling with rosy mouth,
And glances, Ah! with glances!
Once more in Hell, Ah! would that I could
Enjoy her sweet advances!"

Convulsively, erect had sprung Tannhäuser
With cheeks aflame; — from top of head to footsoles
By passion torn his frame was all a-tremble.
But as the irritated Afric lion
To his master's nod and voice obedient is,
So bent before the earnest scrutiny
Of Innocent the passion torn Tannhäuser.
"Thou sank'st in her embraces?" — "Yes, I did so!
Encircled I was by that goddess's arm,
Embraced by her and embracing,—
And clung to her body white and warm,
Her heaving form enlacing.
The heat of her languorous breath I enjoyed
And her body's sinuous motion,
With her loosened locks I dallied and toyed
As with the waves of the Ocean.
I kissed and kissed her lips and arms
And the arching brows of her forehead,
While on her soul-ensnaring charms
To gaze I was never tired.
And when we were weary of amorous ways
And of kissing and toying together,
And both were reclining and taking our ease
On that silken couch of pleasure,—
Then; — let me consider the next thing there,
'T was so long ago and yet seems near,—
Then music I heard but I knew not whence,
It awoke and called and invited thence
To a refreshing ablution.
Then secret doors flew open wide

To right and left, as with languorous stride
We sought the shore of the Ocean.
  To the glittering hall returned at last,
To a merry refreshing gorgeous repast
We sat down in gala apparel.
And then, — then first with chatter and song
Of pigmies came a numerous throng
To serve us deftly at table.
Of gnomes and of nymphs a crowd now appeared,
And boisterous shouting and laughing I heard
As I drank from goblets the brightest, —
And in a seductive and serpentine dance
The loveliest damsels floated askance,
Appareled in gossamer lightest.
Soon wild and wilder reveled the swarm,
Some wrestled and leapt, interlacing, —
And many a saucy presuming arm
Some dazzling form was embracing.
In Venus' house 't was license all,
As if to lavish Earth's treasures, —
There flourished riotous revel and brawl,
And many secret pleasures.

  Then beckoned the traitress, I followed as lover
To her secret retreat in her curtained bower,
To renew our raptures delightful,
Not dreaming of treachery frightful.
Near her I sat on a tiger skin,
No word she spoke, brooding within, —
Regarding me she idle reclined,
As seeming to muse with reflective mind.
With her smooth round arm she supported her neck; —
From her eyes with their luring inquisitive beck
Shot changeable flashes of menace, —
Now coal-black in color, then greenish.

With radiant smile, as she were won,
And melting looks she drew me on,—
Then icy cold with poisonous breath,
As poignard sharp and threatening death.
By turns my blood ran hot and cold
Before her eyes so compelling and bold.
Then again she pretended affection warm,
And all the charms of her ravishing form
To capture my sensual fancies
Displayed to my wavering senses.
Seducingly smiled the beautiful viper,
And sinuous twisted the crafty enticer,—
Lilies and roses to softest chains winding,
As if to encircle us,— mutual binding.
Each one of her motions from head to foot
Resembled a languishing passionate look,—
With ogling glance to smile she began ;—
" Hast thou not eyes, thou fortunate man ? "

Then quick she assumed,— I clearly saw,—
The features of that loveliest frau
To whom on Earth my heart had flown,
And whom I had quit for Venus alone.
She regarded me blushing, confused, half nude,
As everything yielding for which I had wooed,—
Then changed to a consuming glow,
Enveloping me with its fiery flow,—
And coursing through my veins until
She had bent me wholly to her will ;—
Until to her wiles I had yielded quite
And lay supinely at her feet,—
In suppliance 'fore her beauty bent,
While my suffering heart to this cry gave vent ;—

O Venus! all Heavenly hope I resign,
And the love of all mortal women,—
If clasped to thy breast I may know thou art mine,
Thou shalt be my eternal Hymen.
From the gods above, both Father and Son,
I will turn away with loathing,—
If thou wilt accept my homage alone
And ever refuse me nothing.
The virgins of Earth I will curse and avoid,
The Devil may woo them at pleasure,—
And in thy arms, my immortal bride,
My Soul may be lost forever.
O Venus! Venus! To thee I pray,
Thou empress of all fair women!
Permit me eternally, night and day,
To gaze at thy beauty winning;—
To me vouchsafe the unspeakable rest
Of enjoying thy kiss of affection,
And allow me against thy billowing breast
'Mid rapture to lose recollection;—
And to me swear with passion's glow,
Myself thou hast chosen as lover,—
Tannhäuser's love is like naught below,
As he loves, loves no other!"
Then sprang from her couch that serpent upright,
With anger in every feature,—
Her flashing eyes shot lightnings bright,
And I shrank from that terrible creature.
"Thou; my eternal paramour?
Thou pityful wretch! Mark! Nevermore
Will I trouble myself with thy whining!
I called thee not,— thou cam'st to me,—
What wilt thou that I do with thee?
'Tis thy destiny,—always pining.

What thou arrogant claim'st for thyself alone,
In common with thee has every worm
As a part of its groveling nature;
Created thou wert with irresolute mind, —
Thy passionate soul is like the wind,
Unstable in every feature.
But knowest thou what rapture is?
Flashlike the highest comes and dies,
As sweet as Death!
When thou art gasping life's last breath,
And in a little vaporous wreath
Dissolves the flame which fed thy pride,
Then wilt thou know how close allied
Are the twin delights of death and passion,
Which, scarcely felt, have instant vanished; —
Enough! More time to waste were shame,
Thou'rt lost thyself and lost thy game, —
Forever damned by Heaven's knell
Thou art fallen in the clutch of Hell; —
Good by! We shall meet in its dungeons fell."

She vanished, and then with deafening sound
Infernal laughter I heard all around,
While echoed shriekings appalling, —
And pigmies and nymphs whirled wildly about,
The palace itself shook under the rout,
As if into fragments 'twas falling.
Then trembled the mountain as struck by a blow,
The rocks were rent with a crimson glow,
Disclosing a crater monstrous, —
'Mid thunder and lightning's direst might
I suddenly saw 'twas blackest night,
And down I sank unconscious.

When next again to myself I came,
With fevered pulse,— in my body lame,
Around I groped at random; —
By the glimmering light of the dawning day
In a cavernous cleft confused I lay,
By God and man abandoned."

From speaking ceased Tannhäuser, quite exhausted;
To end had come his crime-laden confession,
Immediate followed by oppressive silence.
With lips tight closed and aspect dark and frowning,
The rising agitation stern repressing
Which as he listened seized the Holy Father,
Pope Innocent his sitting posture quitted
And threatening stood, as were he Heaven's avenger,
Before the man who at his feet was kneeling.
Tannhäuser was abashed, and timorous risking
One hasty glance at Innocent, his judge,
Constrained he felt again to close his eyelids,
And anxiously he stammered: — "Holy Father,
In this my deep distress I humbly pray thee
My sins to grant thy grace and absolution."
"No! No forgiveness!" thundered forth the Pope,—
"Nor here,— nor there in Heaven's eternity!"
"But thou hast been my trust and only refuge,—
On me impose the bitterest expiation,"—
"Away! Begone! No power have I to absolve thee!
Thy pact with Hell, intrigues with demon harlots,
Admit no expiation!" — Innocent cried.
Once more Tannhäuser pleaded: — "Holy Father!
Take not away my trust in God's forgiveness!
Save me thou canst; — if thou but intercedest,
'T will be forgiven me,— some miracle," —

"No, No! for thee will appear no miracle
And no appeal for thee can reach High Heaven.
Behold this thorny stick so dry and withered;
As truly and as sure as this dry cutting
Nor flowers nor leaves will ever again put forth,
So sure it is thou art forever damned!"
Then with emotion torn rushed forth, departing,
By a side doorway from the chapel leading
The Pontiff, as from pestilence quick flying,—
And left the writhing wretch supinely lying.

In the apartment reigned a tomb-like silence,—
A dim obscurity had gradual stolen
Among the arches and the slender columns,
As if they too were,—as the pope—affrighted.
But through a window in the lofty walling
Now broke a sunbeam, like a golden rafter,
Which on the sinner's head directly fell,—
Now on the chilling tilings prostrate lying.
And soon its warmth agreeable felt Tannhäuser,
As if a tender hand were gently jostling,—
Implying,—"Arise! Away! The sun still shines!"
Turning he looked, and on the chapel's ceiling
In sunlight bathed, which now the room was filling,
Confronted him a rich mosaic fresco;—
Enthroned sat there the Holy Virgin Mary
Regarding him with friendliest expression,
While round her groups of wingéd angel cherubs
Like light and fleecy clouds were closely floating,
And at him smiled with childish innocence.
Tannhäuser gazed, but angry shook his head;—

No sunbeam warm, no thought of heavenly mercy,
His soul's dark night within now penetrated,—
Steel cased was now his heart, sealed up completely,—
A single hour had worked the transformation.
  Erect he sprang, fiercely his fist uplifting,
And through the door by which the pope had vanished
Aloud he called,— the arches back re-echoing—:
  "Curse me? My curse on thee and Heaven's mercy!
My curse on all that suppliant hope betrays!
And thus 'twixt thee and me the gate I close!"
Then with a thundrous sound the bronzen doors
Enraged he slammed, and left the Vatican.

  With leap on leap to pass the holy staircase,
It trampling underfoot, Tannhäuser hastened;—
As turned to stone the lookers on stood gaping,—
Tannhäuser fled, — but whither knew he not.

XIV

AMONG RUINS

Among the ruins on the Palatine
For many days delayed the spurnéd knight,
Scarce taking nourishment,— morosely brooding.
No longer was his cooler mood defiant,—
And after passion came consideration,
The fear of God and criminating conscience.
But sometimes his confession thinking over,
And that hour's torment in the Vatican —
As 't were a branded mark he felt the affront
Which he, a knight, perforce had there endured,—
Since quite in vain had been his self abasement.
If he had known — 't was thus to himself he said —
Before the pope he never would have stooped.
Among the grand old ruins sat he lone
And musing o'er their scattered stones, exclaimed;
"Of what I was I now am but a fragment,—
Just such an overturned and ruined temple
On which one scarce can read the old inscription.
These gables like — with forms of gods and goddesses
Of old adorned — my pride of soul lies prostrate;

Like these prone shafts, once to the heavens uppointing,
My strength is crushed and into fragments broken ; —
And fast decaying is my minstrel art,—
As yonder fallen altar to the Gods
Is overrun and clogged by noxious weeds.
What sort of epitaph for me were fitting?
"Love's Devotee and Minstrel?" — Ah! those words,
Upon my shield inscribed, I have renounced,—
In Rhine's deep flood they lie entombed forever.
The inscription on my tomb might run as follows ; —
"With what existed he was not content,
But thought by will alone full strength to acquire
The world according to his whim to fashion,—
With song impassioned wished to make it brighter ; —
Too high he aimed in his pursuit of passion,
And in his heart's and mind's intense desire
Elusive thoughts and feminine hearts to fathom,—
With feet in dust the stars he strove to climb to."

But lapse of time brought other disposition,—
Tannhäuser's smart was merged in resignation
And soon to contrite sorrow was resolved.
But sometimes of his hopeless future thinking,
Again was torn his soul with 'whelming misery
Which drove him straying through the Roman streets.
And strange it was! — when purposeless he wandered,
— A prey to gloomy dreams and dark forebodings —
Invariably to the Vatican
Spontaneous brought him his unconscious footsteps.
'T was not that there he quested something further,
Or hoping once again to meet the pontiff ; —
Oh, no! — wroth was he with himself, and startled,
As often as himself he found thus straying ; —
But yet attracted him some unknown force

— Resistless and incomprehensible —
To that same place which, filled with hate, he quitted;
As — so 't is said — assassins all revisit
The frightful spot where they the murder did.
One day he found himself the palace nearing
And with much self-reproach he turned away,—
Then, little heed to his direction paying,
His way held to the Claudian Acqueduct,
Which thence for miles stretched through the level plain.
The neighborhood a garden much resembled
Which, long untilled, in Nature's dress was clothed.
On every side the spring was now advancing,
In freshest green the trees and shrubs were dressed,—
While 'midst the grass were blooming countless flowers;
Over the tops of lofty oaks had clambered
The vining roses, now with blooms luxuriant,
And little warblers flew from bough to bough.
The aqueduct's broad arches were all covered
And webbed around so thickly with green ivy
That of the archwork none in sight remained,—
And through the vaultings and the foliage glistened
The clear coerulian skies of Italy; —
Afar spread out the sun-illumed Campagna,
While further off shone bright the Sabine Mountains.
To the luxuriant growth surrounding him
His sad remorseful mood responded not,—
But entrance found Spring's voice within his soul,
Filling his listening ear with gentle whispers,
Ambition in his breast once more implanting.
From his lethargic mood awoke Tannhäuser,
His old but youthful friend he recognized,—
Once more he felt the springtime's subtile power;
To right and left its rosy cheeks he looked on,
Its verdant dress observed and smiling aspect,

And drinking in the balmy air, — reflected; —
"Each year the Earth its outward dress renews,—
Cannot man do as much, if so he wills?
Much, much is past, and much remains before me, —
Who knows how far, who knows how near — in truth —
The worst and wickedest of my misdoings
— Though making tremble every human heart —
Are from, or to, eternal condemnation?
With every step God's judgment I am nearing,
And to the inevitable must resign me, —
Yet fear of that forbidding distant shore
Shall not all present earthly joys embitter.
Almighty God looks down on my repentance,—
Of all my thoughts this one is far the bitterest; —
But whatsoever crimes one has committed,
How e'er incredibly he may have suffered,
That cannot his existence quite extinguish,—
The intrepid man is conqueror over Fortune.
Suppose nor God nor Man should e'er forgive me; —
If live I must, rejected and abandoned,
In poverty alone,— in spite of all
As yet my heart is not so mortal wounded
That I, until 'tis time my sins to expiate,
Cannot determined face life's span remaining.
In royal Philip's savage border warfare
For every trusty sword there still is work; —
My suit he will not spurn,— his mind I know.
And if a truce from war his bugle soundeth,
Another task I know, my will awaiting,
Whereto my inclination strongly tends.
Thou soul of ancient Rome!— which round me breathes,
And, speaking from these stones, with me converses,
Which everywhere in rose and slab I see,—
O teach me how to soar with godlike pinions,—

Some masterpiece creating and constructing,
Which ages after ages shall endure!"—
  Thus spoke the poet,— then gave himself to musing,—
Nor knew he well how long he thus had pondered
When the evening sun the mountain tops was gilding.
Then all at once from a secluded thicket
A nightingale his melting song trilled forth.
Tannhäuser silent to the carol listened,
And warmer, softer, grew his yielding heart;—
Thus sung the warblers in his native country,
At home among the thickets on the Danube,
Where he so many times their song had heard,—
Ah!— with a lovely, gracious, youthful maiden.
  Throughout his knight's career in foreign countries
The little brown bird's song he quite neglected;
But now it sang as if his own tongue voicing;—
As if recalling him his country to,
Which long he had ignored and most forgotten.
His courage rose,— as if from out those bushes
Came forth the image of his early boyhood
And at him gazed and smiled and to him beckoned;—
Then o'er his brooding heart came homesickness
Which firm possession took,— all rest destroying,
And in its place set up a restless longing,
Until erect he sprung— ecstatic crying;—
  "My thanks accept, ye wondrous works of springtime,
Since ye my olden ties bring back to mé!
Obey I will, and homeward turn my footsteps,
And my belovéd land once more will see!"

XV

AT BURG KÜRENBERG

A Mayday 'twas but dull and raw,
The land a chilling wind swept o'er,—
By misting fog almost obscured
The Danube's curling billows reared.
To the room of the Manor's lord
At Kürenberg there came a man
And said: — "Below a pilgrim wan
Demands with you to speak a word."
"Tell him he cannot see me now,
Of meat and drink give him good store,—
Then bid him on his way to go
And courteous show him to the door."
"But Sir, he will not stir for us,
To ask for alms seems not his mission,—
His mien is haughty, and his voice
Imperious sounds to those who listen."
"His name?"—"To us he will not give it,
Yourself he knows,—'t is easy seen
With him he brings a weighty secret
For you alone." "Conduct him in!"

Now they exchange a formal greeting,
Each scans the other with earnest thought,—
Then to the bearded pilgrim speaking
The baron said; — "I know you not."
"But my Erwin! long years have vanished
Since that eventful day when we
In secret stole away and planned it
Richard Plantagenet to free."
"O Henry mine! Again art with us?
A thousand times thou art welcome here,—
My boyhood's friend and minstrel famous,
Of all the sex the idol dear!"
Then they embraced affectionately,
Questioned of this and that and home,—
"That robe to don, what cause has made thee?
To us whence comest thou?" "From Rome!"
Tannhäuser earnest said: — "Confession
Of sin and woe I will make to thee,—
This old frock is my one possession,
Erwin,— another garb give me!
Home to return a longing seized me,
And once more see my native land,—
Forgetting no home had I really,
Save Kürenberg on Danube's strand."
"Had, Henry? had? — 'T is now and always!
Whate'er thou likest select to wear,
And choose thyself thy own apartment
And sword and horse; — Away with care!
Not strife but peace the empire ruleth,
Here let us stay and quiet rest,—
Until intrigue the land embroileth,
At Kürenberg thou art more than guest."
Then at each other earnest gazing
Their hands were clasped in friendship glad,

And later when at table chatting
Henry in knightly garb was clad.
When spoken was the final word,
And they were ready to retire,—
From Henry's lips Erwin had heard
His story and adventures dire.

So light Tannhäuser's heart had grown
Since in his friend he had confided,
Who all his confidence quick won,
That what so much disturbed his mind had
As ice in Sun was melting fast.
Full half his burden now was flown,
And almost joyously he passed
To the apartment now his own,
Nor noticed he or stairs or casings
As through the corridors he strode.
A chamber pleasant and capacious
Was given him in his old abode,
But not delaying to look around
Tannhäuser quick was sleeping sound.
At break of day woke him the glimmer
Of sunshine streaming golden-red,
Then bright illuming with its shimmer
An ivory cross above the bed.
On him the truth was slowly dawning ;
Was not the same cross glittering
When on that last eventful morning
A maiden's room he stood within?
That fustian curtain over yonder,
The glow those colored panes upon,—
Why! this was Irmgard's sleeping chamber!
To rest on her bed he had gone!

And as he looked seemed quite familiar
The rafters and the hearth of stone,—
The wainscot and each fluted pillar,
The table and the locker brown.
  Here Irmengard had dwelt and thronèd,
With her here often he had been,—
To him recurred how she had scolded
In various spots,— without, within.
At rest he saw her, saw her walking
With hasty and elastic tread,—
Once more he seemed to hear her talking,
And catch her heaving balmy breath.
He listened for her footsteps nimble,—
Where art thou then? — Wilt not advance?
Hark there! Is not the door a-tremble?
Is not her rosy countenance
Peeping within, roguish beguiling,
Laughing aloud with merry grace?
From every corner at him smiling
The blooming maiden's gracious face?
  Then further flew his recollection
From Irmgard's budding youth away
To the blown rose, and with affection
His thoughts on her concentred lay.
On those sweet hours his thoughts now lingered
Which he with her at Scharf'berg spent,—
How love had bound them, rosy-fingered,
And to those days enchantment lent.
  'T was Irmgard young, and Irmgard matron,
A twofold form in one combined,—
A beauteous double constellation
Which shining once had now declined.
And he now at her father's mansion
Her sleeping chamber was within,—

Repentance was his sleep's companion,
What parted them was his own sin.
"Thou cross, still shine upon those walls
On which she oft has gazed!" he said;—
"By all which Irmengard recalls
Were I assured and comforted."
Then from the open casement spying
O'er wood and stream and river *gau
A hawk he saw in freedom flying;—
"Thou gallant bird,—how happy thou!"
Then came Erwin;—"I wish to inquire
If to thy rest was lacking aught,—
Canst thou control the weather dire?
To us bright sunshine thou hast brought."
Tannhäuser silence kept, but pointed
The apartment to,—Erwin spoke on;—
"Thou art right! This was her chamber wonted,—
Preferrest thou another one?
Gerlinde's choice when thou arrivedst,—
My loving spouse, who nothing knows;
Of all our rooms it is the quietest,
Still if it hurts and you propose,—"
But shook his head the knight, refusing,
And to Erwin his hand held forth,
In place of thanks his dexter pressing
The while he smiled,—nor saying aught.
At breakfast sitting, not long after,
Tannhäuser queried with a smile;—
"Hast thou no high bred horse to master?
I hope he is uncommon wild!"
"Oh, yes! I have a horse in stable",—
Replied Erwin,—"unbroken still;
No one to ride him has been able,
His courage baffles all our skill."

*Meadow.

"Then have him saddled," — begged Tannhäuser,
"For exercise I wish to roam,—
However he may kick or bluster,
Subdued I will surely bring him home
And ask me not my destination
Nor what my aim, but leave give me
My time to pass as suits the occasion,—
The roads I know and every tree."

When all had left the breakfast table
To the courtyard the horse was led,—
With sounding hoofs the earth he trampled,
His action showed the thoroughbred; —
Rejoiced, Tannhäuser grasped the reins,
And lightly in the saddle vaulting
"Good-by!" — said to his anxious friends,
And spurred up on his stallion snorting.
Erwin called after him; — "Good luck!
Be sure to safe and sound come back!"
But when Erwin's concern he saw,
He laughed; — "That's what I am riding for!"
"What does he mean by that, I wonder?"
Asked Frau Gerlinde of Erwin; —
"Is he unwell? Has happed some blunder?
A man of steel I him esteem."
Replied Erwin; — "Ask thou no question!
Relief he seeks from sore depression,—
The memories of his boyhood's day
To solitude drive him away.
His purpose is the woods to travel
In quest of that belovéd spot
Where after many a foolish quarrel
We made it up, and all forgot."
Gerlinde hushed,— hers was a nature
Unprone to pry in others' woes,—

For well she knew now every feature
Of their young life, told by her spouse.
  Right judged Erwin; — his old companion
For weeks thus traversed vale and mead,—
While grew light-hearted Ofterdingen
And more obedient grew the steed.
At length the irksome task was done,
The horse Tannhäuser had subdued,—
The poignant grief had overcome
Which long had ruled his every mood.
  One day returning from the forest,
"Erwin!" said he,— "I am born anew!
My peace of mind I have recovered,
Now hear what 't is I have in view.
'T is not my wish to drone at leisure
And regulate thy weather cock,—
Since war is none, nor seek I treasure,
A work shall issue from this spot
Which in my brain with pressure ceaseless
Has long been urging me to rhyme; —
God grant that I my aim accomplish,
To write a grand heroic poem!
  Recallest thou the old traditions
Which once to us old Conrad told
With sage remarks and admonitions,
When housèd here from winter's cold?
Of valiant heroes' distant journeys,
Of bold exploits with lance and shield,—
Of Dieterich, the monarch Bèrnese,
Of squamous Siegfried and Brunhild?
All these as legacies I cherished
And in my bosom treasure still,—
And to my memory always present
My mind the grand old legends fill.

The driveling of lovesick passion
As mildew I have cast aside,
For through my conscience's bitter lashing
My intellect has fructified.
And not in vain have been my efforts,
No more I visionary dream,—
For all my sufferings priceless treasures
Perforce of destiny now seem.
My own career's mistakes and glories,
The adventures of my lifetime brief
Together with those ancient stories
In one connected web I will weave.
The joy of Love, Hate's animosities,
The feuds of kings, heroic strife,
The thundrous tale of dire ferocities
Shall in my verse rehearse their life.
Forthwith must I to work again!
So give me parchment now and pen,—
With arms the Kürenberg shall ring,
Burgundians storm these walls within!"

In Irmgard's chair sat Ofterdingen
At Irmgard's table every morn,—
With grand concepts his brain was teeming,
Responding to his zeal new born.
Wild forest flowers ornamented
The crucifix above the cot,
Toward which his vision often tended
While sitting in that sacred spot.
It seemed as if in that apartment
Was present his belovéd's soul,
Who surely in some distant convent
Was praying might be cured his dole.

He assumed that all his composition
By her was seen and sanctified,
And that her innocent affection
His quickened thoughts with wings supplied.
The opening stanzas he adopted
Which formerly Herr Conrad sang,
As introduction they well fitted
With their sonorous buoyant clang;
That metre also he had sung in
At Wartburg in his desperate need,
And finally its use had won him
From Wolfram's hand the golden meed.
Among his heroines was Chrimhilde,
A maid imperial, high born,—
Whose outraged passion raging wildly
He drew, — remembering Irmgard's scorn.
With zest heroic deeds he vaunted,
The work grew more and more inspired,—
By glorious conceptions haunted
More verse to add he never tired.
All day he sat composing, diligent,—
To ride or hunt with hounds and spear
He scarce allowed himself the privilege,
Because with work 't would interfere.

And now, when skies were clear, descended
A thunderbolt upon the land, —
Once more with feuds and quarrels rended
By the stroke of a murderous hand.
In wild commotion rose the breakers,
And during the confusion dread
The Ship of State lost mast and anchors,—
One cry went up: — "The King is dead!"
At Bamberg Town in a dark hour
Philip the King to death was done

In prime of his imperial power,
When he Rome's might had overcome.
'Mong princes all, the kindest rated
Sprung from the Hohenstaufen race
Lay treacherously assassinated,
And with him rightful power and peace.
  Never on Germany had fallen
Such murderous and fateful blow
In full ten centuries,—appalling
Was now this period of its woe.
Frederick, too young to assert his title
By force of arms, was far from home,
And Otto seized the crown, unrightful;
Once more supreme again was Rome.
  The bloody deed all hearts transfixed,
—By Philip's enemies condemned—
And brought to Henry grief unmixed,
As he had lost a bosom friend.
Beset by faithful recollection
His mind was filled with bitter teen,
And dwelling on her rare perfection
He thought of Philip's gracious Queen.
Now he was dead, that monarch glorious
Who over all so mildly throned,
So brilliant, affluent, and joyous;—
His death Tannhäuser sore bemoaned.
  Depart he must and tear the assassin,
— Ev'n if to the altar's foot he clung—
In pieces, and the fragments scatter
As food the ravenous crows among.
But, Ah!—himself had need of leaven;
What in Rome passed, had he forgot?
How dare he, self condemned, 'neath Heaven
Usurp an avenger's sacred lot?

Again upon his conscience grated
That dreadful unforgiven crime,
Which final had him separated
From Heaven's grace throughout all time.
For days moody he sat and ailing,
Repentanceful and dire distraught,—
But finally he ceased bewailing
And in his work he comfort sought.
On Walter von der Vogelweide
He thought, and on his prophecy,—
"Some day, when by misfortune vexéd
Thy harp thou strikest, think on me!"
And now grew dark the poem's action,
His mind was seething bitterly,—
The subjects of his verse were faction,
Turmoil, deceit and treachery.
The gruesome passage he was shaping,
How Hagen with King Gunther joined
In Siegfried's base assassination,—
And how Chrimhilde for him mourned.
The poem's matter, long considered,
His mind creative wholly filled;
How direful purposed, deep embittered,
To avenge her husband's death Chrimhild.
To Erwin fragments he oft recited,
And when he chanced to ask one day,—
"Thy poem, — what hast thou it entitled?"
Replied :— "The Nibelungen Lay."

When dark the night the morning follows,
If long it tarries yet 't will come;
Cheer up! however deep one's sorrows,
Always shines through at last the sun.

Continuous and droll resounding,
At the outer gate was quite a stir,—
"Halloo! Who with the bones is pounding?"
"From Adamunt a messenger!
A letter have I to deliver,
By a good brother sent and writ,
To Sir Knight Henry Ofterdingen,—
Important is the news in it!"
The messenger was quick admitted;
Henry, astonished, scarce could break
With trembling hands the letter's signet,
Then peered within and instant spake;—
"Erwin, a miracle is done,
As if a stream uphill should run,—
Or Sun stand still in the azure Heaven;
Old Frutus, ink-hater, has written!"

The letter then he read aloud;—

"Frutus, Brother Admontanus,
To his former friend belovéd
Called Tannhäuser, also known as
The good Knight of Ofterdingen!
To him many salutations
In the name of all the apostles;
In extremity may they help us!
Seeing that and for the reason
Once you privately informed me
That your home was Kürenberge,
Thither send I this epistle;
In thy absence then to Vienna,
As the last resort to Wartburg.
I now send the information,
—As I tell you in this letter—
That in Rome the Holy Father

—God preserve His Condescension! —
Messengers for you has sent out
Hunting up your habitation,
But in vain they sought to find you.
Since the Pontiff, as is proper,
In his wisdom all things knoweth,
—Saving only where thou hidest—
Knows he also that in old times
Thou at Adamunt didst tarry,
And with thy good brother Frutus
Wert quite diligent in Latin.
So a messenger he sent here,
And a wondrous message was it
Which to us he sent expressly.
Innocent, the Holy Father,
Information to thee sendeth
That a miracle has happened.
That his stick, by thee remembered,
Is again alive and verdant,—
Little leaves and buds have germined,
From its withered surface growing.
  To the Father this has proven
Thy transgressions God has pardoned;
In that pardon joins he also,
And absolving gracious sendeth
Thee his apostolic blessing.
But he must some expiation
Lay upon thy guilty shoulders;
—From whose larder hast thou stolen?
  "Never shalt thou 'mong us mortals
While thou livest, nor when dying,
Either orally or written
Let thy name again be mentioned;—

From Earth's memory must it perish!"
These words spoke the Pontiff's messenger.
I don't understand one syllable
Of it all, but feel quite anxious
Thou should'st get the information
If my harmless little letter
Finds thee still among the living.
Many changes in this convent; —
Isenricus and Albanus
No more sing with us in chorus.
I am agéd but not weakly
And am grown a trifle fleshy,—
Am not now obliged to copy
Since I find it quite unhealthy;
Therefore now I end my letter.
Hope you are very well, Sir Ritter!
In your prayers remember Frutus,
Or in private drink a bumper
To our mutual health and welfare.
Amen! say I; — Gloria Deo; —
From thy faithful brother Frutus."

Tannhäuser as he finished reading,
Erwin embraced and joyous cried; —
"Absolved! Absolved! Vouchsafes High Heaven
Its mercy me,— by man denied.
Absolved I am from that transgression,
Just men may meet as I was wont,—
Contented fill my earthly mission,
Cheerful death's coming brave confront."

The embrace Erwin returned with vigor
And earnest said; — "God pardons thee,
And yet the Pope with cruel rigor
Thy name has banned eternally!

Thou must not sign thy grand chef d'oeuvre
When thou hast polished all aright?"
"Its author's name transpire will never
And comet like will be his flight,—
Thus ran the dreamy weird confession;"—
Low spoke the poet,— scarce heard Erwin
Who to him put a rapid question;—
"Say, Henry! was it not a dream?
A feverish dream of witch and devil,
A phantom dire, inspired by Hell,—
That thou with Holda held'st high revel
In the Hörsel?— Consider well!"
Tannhäuser shook his head;— "No, never!
Of that thou canst not me persuade;—
'T was winter time when ill with fever
In the pest-house at Ulm I laid.
Ev'n if by God I am forgiven,
Forget I cannot speedily
Toward Irmengard my conduct sinful
And my atonement now shall be.—
That I renounce both fame and glory
And write secluded and alone;
The poem endure shall ages hoary,
But the author's name remain unknown."

The autumn came with its fierce tempests
And winter with its snow and rime,—
In his apartment sat Tannhäuser,
To writing giving all his time.
Unswerving faith in his own powers
His skill spurred up, his strength increased,—
While pleasant passed the happy hours
From old anxieties released.

To him was granted inspiration
With grand events his mind to fill,
And ardent his imagination
With forms he peopled at his will.
His subject fixed his close attention,
Exclusive occupied his mind,—
While fiery and bold invention
With lofty thought his soul refined.
His old time impulses had vanished,
His passionate unrest was gone,—
' T was but a phantasm dim, now banished,
Which far away from him was flown.
Unselfish love 't was now he pictured;
All carnal promptings raised above,
In pleasant revery he pondered
The stainlessness of worthy love.
With zealous care scenes he invented,
His verse reviewed and forward pressed,—
And when heroic deeds he painted
Supremest joy filled full his breast.
The noblest of all aspirations
Had full possession of his soul;
Love lives in poet revelations,
Invention is the highest goal.
And wilt thou then in fancy fashion
A world which with thy own keeps chime,—
Paint deeds of valor and of passion,
'T is only possible in rhyme.

At last 't was brought to its conclusion,
Majestic weaving grave and gay; —
The Epic of the Nibelungen
Before him on his table lay.

Two years upon it he had striven
Since he to Kürnberg had come back,
And to the poem his mind had given;
It fairly stretched him on the rack
To end at last his treasured rhyme
Which occupied had so much time,—
But smiling said he;— "Not for naught
Hast thou upon this Earth been brought!"

With deep solicitude reflecting,
His future loomed obscure and drear,—
But one thing asked he of kind Fortune
And for that needed shield and spear.
He wished not to his grave to totter,
By old age shriveled and decayed,—
But fall in heat of battle rather
As conquering paladin he craved.
From Sicily's famed groves so distant
A new risen star of hope now gleamed,—
Whose fortunes he espoused persistent,
For him his lawful king he esteemed.
Frederick, the youthful Hohenstaufen,
Was grieving for his royal right,—
His lawful heirdom was witholden,
His lawful empire torn with fight.
There was his goal;— To his companion
He spoke; — "Erwin, I have thought all o'er,
And what at length I have resolved on
No pleading words can overpower.
I purpose joining Frederick youthful,
Of thee equipments ask and horse;
For him I will battle leal, truthful,
Until I perish in his cause.

Take thou my poem as if I dead were,
Guard it as carefully as gold,—
And send it by a trusty carrier
To Austrian Archduke Leopold.
But to me swear this very day
The trust to accept, and never mention
That he who wrote this epic lay
Was Henry, Knight of Ofterdingen.

Erwin, although it tore him inly,
Assented finally though loath,—
And both himself and all his kinfolk
To silence bound with solemn oath.
Tannhäuser then horse lance and shield
Selected for the battle field,—
And now these words his shield displayed;
"Honor to God! To the King my blade!"

At dawn of day he passed the gate
And rode away from Kürenberg,—
Since then of Ofterdingen's fate
Has mortal ear heard never a word.

Finis.

VALEDICTORY

THE LOVE DRAUGHT

Preserved to us in epics, in old traditions
told,
Are many curious stories of our forefathers
bold,—
How they the maidens courted, how they
increased their store,
How they rode forth to battle, and honor
was their law.

Of an old loving custom I now must speak
in song,
To-day it still is current, we have cher-
ished it full long,—
When someone dear to memory from
earthly scenes has sped,
The living drain a goblet in honor of the
dead.

We utter and we whisper what each one
knows or thinks,
Then each one sips in silence, the glass in
silence sinks,
The draught is meant to honor the mem-
ory of their days,
And since our fathers taught us, to them
be thank and praise!

They christened it the "Love Draught,"
it passed the circle round,
And men and women pledged their eternal
faith fast bound,—
And was the goblet golden, or only earth-
en ware,
Or Urus horn or wooden, the name "Love-
cup" it bare.

This moment reverently I hold in hand
that cup,
It is with amber rhine-wine to its very
brim filled up,—
For I would drink to one who to me was
very dear
While writing out his story; — His voice I
often hear.

Where are the Minnesingers who gave
their lives to song,
Whose melodies the ages to us have echoed
down ?
Ye old-time gallant minstrels, tell us where
ye have passed!
Heinrich Von Ofterdingen, didst thou find
rest at last?

Knew I thy place of burial I would take my
staff in hand,
And to it make a pilgrimage, and at thy
grave would stand,
And if no roses grew there, I'd plant one
on thy shrine,
And would thy shelt'ring hillock bedew
with golden wine.

VALEDICTORY

Thou hadst a passionate nature; wert quick
to resent a blow,
Thy heart 'twas fixed thy destiny, thy
heart's impassioned glow,—
And if too high thy strivings, for thy
errors thou didst pay,
Too late thou hast learned that pleasures
in sorrows pass away.

In silence thou didst ride off in quest of
thy last fight,
Didst trackless from men vanish in ever-
lasting night,—
Thy shield is long since broken, and hushed
thy tuneful lines,
But yet upon this planet thy wondrous
genius shines.

As when the sun, departing, has set at
fall of night,
And, afar the land illuming, the heavens
glow with light
Transmitted from that bright orb, from
vision sunk away,
So streameth down the ages thy valedic-
tory lay.

When erst 'twas read in Vienna, where
first it came to light,
All hearts alternate quivered with rapture
and affright,—
Like bells it gently tinkled, like ocean
billows rushed,
While its heroic action the ravished audi-
ence hushed.

As mounted on a charger, thy verse has
crossed the world,
Victorious as thy heroes of supernatural
mould,—
Thy name is signed not to it, thou hast
labored secretly,—
Thou Nibelungen poet, I drain this cup to
thee!

Truly the poets inherit the happiest lot on
earth,
They sing the high conceptions to which
their minds give birth,—
They conjure Hell and Heaven with their
inspired wand,
And hence departing go to the unknown
silent land.

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